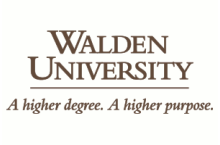

2019

Transformational Leadership in Public Schools Within Impoverished Areas

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Suzanna Clifton

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Transformational Leadership in Public Schools Within Impoverished Areas

by

Suzanna M. Clifton

MA, Jacksonville State University, 2002

BS, Jacksonville State University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2019

Abstract

Most students in schools from impoverished areas in one southeastern state were not achieving academically according to state-mandated accountability expectations. However, students in 3 impoverished schools from 1 school district demonstrated successful academic achievement according to state standards. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how 14 administrators of these impoverished schools described personal transformational leadership behaviors. The study was based on the conceptual framework of transformational leadership as defined by a set of leadership behaviors. Data were collected from individual interviews and personal reflection surveys of administrators of public schools in 1 school district in which at least 50% of the student population was from low socioeconomic circumstances. Through thematic analysis using a priori coding, open coding, and axial coding of administrators' descriptions, key results aligned with the conceptual framework indicated that application of transformational leadership behaviors explained much of the successful outcomes of the schools. The themes that resonated through the study included relationships, collective efficacy, and a culture of coaching. The study contributes to positive social change by identifying areas in which school leaders may build professional capacity to more effectively use transformational leadership behaviors to positively affect the academic achievement of students from impoverished households.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Despite years of educational reform movements and increased accountability in the United States, evidence suggests that public schools are still not meeting the needs of students from impoverished areas, and gaps continued to prevail in achievement outcomes among those from more advantaged households when compared to students from less advantaged households (Brown & Green, 2014; Rickman, 2015; Schippers, 2014; Woods & Martin, 2016). Researchers found schools should have strong and effective leaders to show academic gains; however, the school leaders' capacity to improve student achievement was influenced by the socioeconomic background of students (Ehisuoria & Aigbokhaebho, 2014; Makgato, & Mudzanani, 2019; Sang, Chepchieng, & Kariuke, 2015). Due to the continued failure of public schools to produce increased student outcomes, the leadership behaviors of administrators in public schools should be further examined (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2013; Francois, 2014; Tichnor-Wagner, Garwood, Bratsch-Hines, & Vernon-Feagans, 2016; Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). The study investigated the transformational leadership behaviors of public-school administrators serving students from impoverished areas that advanced student achievement outcomes.

Researchers found school leadership did influence student achievement outcomes (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Pan, Nyeu, & Cheng, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Also, researchers revealed a relationship between the implementation of the transformational leadership related behaviors and positive student learning results (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Waite, 2014; Yoon, 2016). Research also concluded school leadership

decisions could influence the socioeconomic gaps in academic achievement (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013; Holliday, Cimetta, Cutshaw, Yaden, & Marx, 2014). Though findings indicated an evident relationship between effective school leadership and advanced student achievement, researchers found transformational leadership behaviors were not consistently and pervasively implemented in public schools (Makgato, & Mudzanani, 2019; Mora-Whitehurst, 2013; Sammons, Davis, Day, & Gu, 2014; Woods & Martin, 2016; Young et al., 2017).

School leaders were deemed the most-influential school-related factor affecting student achievement outside of teachers in the classrooms (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walhstrom, 2004; McKibben, 2013; Pan et al., 2017; Radinger, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The school leader's role was crucial in focusing the priorities on teaching and learning (Zheng, Li, Chen, & Loeb, 2017). School administrators leveraged relationships and provide organizational structures that facilitated environments enabling teachers to meet diverse student needs (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Louis, 2015). Transformational leadership concentrated on changing the organization through behaviors by school leadership to influence teachers for a common purpose or engage in changing practice (Bush, 2014; Cansoy, 2019; Kellar & Slayton, 2016). Additional research was needed to explore the application of transformational leadership, particularly in schools where most students came from low-income households (Kellar & Slayton, 2016; Makgato, & Mudzanani, 2019; Rickman, 2015; Woods & Martin, 2016).

Students from impoverished areas were not achieving academically according to state-mandated accountability expectations in the southeastern United States; however, according to [REDACTED] Department of Education in 2018, three schools advanced student learning with the population. The purpose of the qualitative case study was to investigate the perspectives of school administrators regarding personal leadership behaviors related to local student achievement outcomes. The study was based on the conceptual framework of transformational leadership style as defined by a set of leadership behaviors (see Bass, 1985). A qualitative methodology using the case study design established administrators' current transformational leadership behaviors and supports to personal leadership behaviors.

The potential impact of the study is that it may provide school administrators insight on effective leadership behaviors to better support the learning needs of students from impoverished backgrounds. The study outcome may impact social change by identifying areas in which school leaders may build professional capacity, knowledge, and skills to more effectively use transformational leadership behaviors and positively affect the academic achievement of students from impoverished households.

In this chapter, I will explain the background, research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope of the study, limitations, and significance of study.

Background

Many low-performing schools could be described with characteristics including poverty, inadequate facilities, ineffective administrators, teachers who lacked the

appropriate professional qualifications, and disengaged students (Ayodele, Buari, & Oguntuase, 2016; Brown, 2012). The ineffectiveness of school leadership was the inability to clearly articulate the mission, establish a path for improvement, cultivate a healthy and productive learning climate, motivate teachers, and craft a supportive instructional approach (Ayodele et al., 2016; Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Ojera & Yambo, 2014; Tan, 2012; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Prior researchers showed school leaders could impact meaningful school improvement and positive student achievement outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004; Merritt, 2016).

Recent research indicated students' socioeconomic status had the most substantial influence on cognitive scores than any other factor (Hanover Research, 2014). Providing access to the knowledge and skills needed to promote academic growth for developing prepared students was an urgent issue in schools. Students continued to struggle with literacy development, comprehension, and vocabulary (Mesmer & Hiebert, 2015; Smith, Schiano, & Lattanzio, 2014). Sixty percent of elementary economically disadvantaged students, over 50% of middle grades economically disadvantaged students, and over 45% of high school economically disadvantaged students were not meeting the state-mandated literacy benchmark in the southeastern United States as reported by [REDACTED] Department of Education in 2018. Over 60% of children attending public school in the state lived in poverty (Suitts, 2015). Understanding the context of the school environment should be paramount in determining a path for school and student success (Klar & Brewer, 2013).

While classroom instruction was the most impactful school-related factor to students' academic success, effective leadership was the second-highest influencer (Leithwood et al., 2004; Radinger, 2014; Young et al., 2017). With the heavy emphasis on accountability in public schools today, Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) observed the necessity of having an effective leader in high poverty schools. Administrators were challenged with supporting a wide range of student needs and providing equitable programming for all students. Not only were schools facing the challenge of high poverty rates, but they also addressed mitigating factors before learning could even take place, such as caring for students' basic needs, addressing absenteeism, dealing with high student and staff transiency, and promoting family engagement.

School leaders worked to develop systems and structures, providing equity for all students in the learning environment (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2015; Woods & Martin, 2016). Effective school leadership required an individual to understand the complexity of the components and manage each associated with difficult environments in poverty. Lower academic performance for students of poverty had been a well-documented and widespread problem throughout prior studies. Tivnan and Hemphill (2015) advocated for the achievement gap of students from low-income backgrounds be made a priority in the school reform movement. Though efforts were underway for some time to tackle the needs of disadvantaged learners, researchers recommended schools change the collective mindset from focusing on student skill deficiencies to that of strong leadership and instructional expertise (Stone-Johnson, 2014; Woods & Martin, 2016).

Reform in the educational system compelled school leadership to think differently in response to the changing needs of students, growing the professional capacity of teachers, and outcries from communities (Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Young et al., 2017). Transformational leadership style supported organizational change (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). The education reform movement should not focus solely on the teacher but also on the school leader who built a collective approach to the learning environment, influenced instructional leadership decisions, and established a supportive infrastructure that propagates interventions for students (Louis, 2015). Administrators who demonstrated transformational leadership clearly articulated vision, motivated others, supported intellectual stimulation, and provided opportunities for individual personal growth (Daniels, Hondeghem, & Dochy, 2019). Smith (2016) asserted transformational leadership positively influenced student learning by building a culture committed to organizational success. The power of the transformational leader was the ability to focus school improvement efforts on increased student achievement through organizational conditions to support and emphasize quality instructional behaviors (Baptiste, 2019; Mora-Whitehurst, 2013).

Problem Statement

According to [REDACTED] Department of Education in 2018, students from impoverished areas were not achieving academically according to mandated accountability expectations in the southeastern United States. While over 60% of students in public schools came from impoverished households, over 60% of elementary economically disadvantaged students, over 50% of middle grades economically

disadvantaged students, and over 45% of high school economically disadvantaged students were not meeting the literacy benchmark. Public schools in the state had not met the accountability improvement targets for economically disadvantaged students in English language arts in the past 5 years. Teachers and administrators worked to improve the achievement of at-risk, economically disadvantaged students through programs and various instructional strategies. Through addressing the root cause of a lack of professional expertise of teachers' instructional practices, literacy achievement continued to persist as an area in need of improvement in public school districts with high poverty levels according to state-mandated accountability measures.

A synthesis of research revealed of all the school-influenced factors contributing to what and how students learn at school, leadership was second in strength only to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Radinger, 2014; Young et al., 2017). Research on administrators' perspectives of how leadership behaviors affected student performance was limited among students from impoverished backgrounds. According to Zheng et al. (2017), an administrator was responsible for establishing the priorities for teaching and learning in his/her school, and data did not serve as evidence that many school leaders determined effective leadership behaviors that mediated instruction for struggling, low-income students. The lack of research indicated a gap in knowledge of administrators' leadership behaviors related to the subgroup. The study was a logical step for inquiry, based on data and the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. Though state-mandated accountability measures confirmed low academic achievement for students from impoverished backgrounds, three schools with many students from low socioeconomic households demonstrated advancement of student learning as referenced by [REDACTED] Department of Education in 2018. Through the study, I sought to explain how the phenomenon of interest, the leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to the successful academic achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds. The inquiry was supported by the conceptual framework of transformational leadership style as defined by a set of behaviors articulated by Bass (1985). Transformational leadership behaviors included building trust, acting with integrity, encouraging others, encouraging innovative thinking, and coaching and developing people (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

As the diverse needs of students increase, successful school leaders should focus on thinking and problem solving (Clarke, 2016). Radinger (2014) stated:

> School leaders, a small, but pivotal group of the teaching profession, play a key role for teaching and learning through their pedagogical leadership and their responsibility for managing, developing and evaluating their teachers in a context of increasing complexity, greater school autonomy, and accountability. (p. 388)

Expanded knowledge about transformational leadership behaviors to support the learning skills of impoverished children could occur by conducting the research study.

To address the purpose of the study, I interviewed school administrators one-on-one to record personal perceptions about transformational leadership behaviors engaged to improve student achievement and collected personal reflections through a brief survey. The academic and leadership focus of the local schools matched the commitment of the study as the district mandated implementation of transformational leadership. The research informed how administrators in impoverished schools with successful learning outcomes perceived themselves as leaders and influenced the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Responses also determined what supports were in place to assist perceived transformational leadership behaviors. The outcomes of the work could lead to recommendations for school administrators on how to implement highly effective leadership behaviors that advance effective teaching strategies and cultivate successful learning programs for the purpose of positively affecting the achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement describe personal transformational leadership behaviors?

RQ2: What do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement perceive as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was based on transformational leadership. Burns (1978) first introduced the concept and defined transformational leadership as a process in which "leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (p. 6). Bass (1985) expanded on the idea by way of developing its implications on followers' motivation and the impact on performance. Transformational leadership was known to promote organizational change (Bass, 1985; Daniels et al., 2019; Stump, Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, & Mater, 2016). Another evident byproduct of transformational leadership was an increase in effectiveness of those working within the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders could heighten outcomes otherwise not considered possible by the followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Another function of the model was to increase the effectiveness of those within the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders could affect followers in a way that resulted in heightened outcomes than considered possible by the followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transformational leadership was defined by a set of leadership behaviors that foster successful organizational change as leaders interact with followers (Bass, 1985). The behaviors exhibited by transformational leaders are reflective of four facets including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Although a transformational leader might not present all behaviors, he/she understood the necessity of setting priorities in his/her leadership (Bass, 1990). Whereas the key elements of

transformational leadership are explained, Chapter 2 will provide a more thorough explanation of the conceptual framework.

The idealized influence aspect entailed specific conduct and qualities of the leader and was divided into the two sub dimensions of idealized influence attributes and idealized influence behaviors (Felfe, Tartler, & Liepmann, 2004). The transformational leader was respected and trusted by followers; and the leader was recognized with "exceptional abilities, endurance and determination" by the same individuals (Stump et al., 2016, p. 83). The transformational leader acted as a role model for followers. Followers attributed decision-making risks to a transformational leader and responded by acting predictably because they entrusted the leader to do the right thing (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The transformational leader develops vision for the future using inspirational motivation, which motivates followers while balancing an understanding of needs to accomplish the tasks. The vision is articulated clearly and consistently as the transformational leader provides the encouragement needed to achieve the goals while communicating the significance of each step necessary to make the vision a reality (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Felfe et al., 2004). The transformational leader strives to express the organization's vision in such a way that followers are willing to pursue a new way of thinking (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Because followers are inspired in an optimistic and enthusiastic manner, the vision challenges others to pursue higher goals for themselves and believed goals were indeed achievable (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Felfe et al., 2004; Steinle, Eichenberg, & Stolberg, 2008). The transformational leader works alongside

followers, showing a heightened effort to accomplish the needed tasks (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Inspirational motivation enables transformational leaders to establish a mutual understanding that promotes positive and expected outcomes.

Intellectual stimulation means motivating followers to think and reflect on choices critically (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders stretch the mindset of followers by empowering them to constantly question and assess the effectiveness of problem solving from a creative and thoughtful viewpoint (Stump et al., 2016). Followers become a part of the decision making and are encouraged to think and iterate new ways to produce better outcomes. Intellectual stimulation allows for problems to be seen from multiple perspectives while developing new ways of thinking and addressing new approaches.

The transformational leader choses to see the individual value that followers bring to the organization and supports followers appropriately through individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Followers are expected to set goals, enabling them to reach their full potential. Taking on the role of mentor and coach, the leader is attuned to the followers' strengths and weaknesses. Opportunities to expand the development of competencies are used to promote learning and enhancement of individual skill sets. The leader pursues face-to-face dialogue and active listening with followers. Transformational leaders not only acknowledge followers as coworkers but also as individuals with unique beliefs and needs who bring a diverse perspective, strengthening the organization as a whole (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Fullan (2002) contextualized transformational leadership to the educational leadership realm by sharing, “The themes are opportunity and depth of learning, policies for individual development, learning in context and systemness, leadership succession and leaders at many levels, and improving the teaching profession” (pp. 16-17). Applying the behaviors of transformational leadership style positively influenced the academic achievement of students (Baptiste, 2019; Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Woods & Martin, 2016; Zheng et al., 2017). Klar and Brewer (2013) suggested that administrators’ leadership efforts were determined successful by understanding the local school environment and contextualizing personal leadership behaviors to those needs. The opportunities allowed for educators to work collaboratively by capitalizing upon the team’s strengths, supporting disadvantaged students’ academic success with intentionality, and nurturing a positive and meaningful climate resulting from strategic improvement goals (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). According to Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2012), “transformational leaders provide compelling visions of a better future and inspire trust through seemingly unshakeable self-confidence and conviction” (p. 26). The conceptual framework allows mentoring and coaching to occur at every level of the organization to equip and encourage growth of the individual and team in meeting the learning needs of low socioeconomic students.

Balyer (2012) studied teachers’ perceptions of administrators’ transformational leadership behaviors and determined administrators’ impact on both student and teacher performance. The findings from the research conducted by Vanblaere and Devos (2016) found that transformational leadership style in schools supported reflection of behaviors

and a collective responsibility focused on student and teacher learning. Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) posited that sustainable school improvement was not based primarily on the leadership behaviors of the administrators but the ability to determine areas of needed focus and "their application of clearly articulated, organizationally shared educational values through multiple combinations and accumulations of time and context-sensitive strategies are layered and progressively embedded in the school's work, culture, and achievements" as related to transformational leadership principles (p. 222). A transformational leader's ability to cultivate an understanding of the collective responsibility of individuals, while also maximizing their strengths, supports teacher and student success.

School leaders who demonstrated transformational leadership sustained instructional leadership, had trusting relationships with staff, supported teachers to facilitate organizational improvement, and included staff in decision-making (Baptiste, 2019). According to Finnigan (2012), transformational leadership behaviors were "important to understanding the extent to which individuals are motivated toward collective goals of the organization" (p. 196). By investigating effective transformational leadership behaviors focused on providing instructional direction and support, developing relationships and trust, creating systems and processes, and promoting change, others could use the findings to address the lack of consistency in implementation by overcoming barriers and sustaining supports.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative methodology using the case study design guided the research. A case study is used to investigate the inquiry of a phenomenon when presented within its context (Yin, 2014). Case studies help researchers take a real-world issue and conduct an in-depth study of the phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Through the study, I sought to explain how the phenomenon of interest, leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to the successful academic achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds. In choosing the qualitative case study design for the study, I sought to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States with successful academic achievement described transformational leadership behaviors in addressing the phenomenon (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Woods & Martin, 2016; Zheng et al., 2017).

The case study methodology is described as a bounded system of interest wherein the researcher established boundaries (Stake, 1978; Yin, 2014). In the study, the bounded system of interest was administrators in three schools who served students from impoverished areas in the southeastern United States showing advancement of student learning. The specific group of leaders from the three schools consisted of administrators who had at least 3 years of experience in administration. The student populations of the three schools reflected an enrollment of at least 60% low-income status. The schools also demonstrated academic gains in the area of English language arts on state-mandated assessments. Each school campus had approximately 400 students in each grade level and represented settings at elementary, middle grades, and high school levels.

To deeply understand the perceived leadership behaviors of school administrators, I collected data via interviews and personal reflection surveys. The primary data for the qualitative case study were derived from school administrator interviews. Each participant took part in an interview that lasted 45 to 60 minutes as the primary source for data collection. Personal reflection surveys were collected to further describe information gathered from the interviews. To accomplish the intention of data analysis, I examined transcriptions of recorded individual interviews, field notes, and personal reflection surveys using *a priori* coding, open coding with thematic analysis, and axial coding to determine themes and patterns that might emerge (see Saldana, 2016). The findings of the study may provide information that assists in creating positive social change of leadership behaviors in the southeastern United States for schools to affect advanced academic outcomes of students from low socioeconomic households.

Definitions

The following definitions will provide context for terms used throughout the study:

Idealized Influence: As a core aspect of transformational leadership, the idealized influence factor capitalized on the trust and confidence of the leader to inspire change in others and in turn might gain more autonomy, control, and influence by analyzing the personal attributes and behaviors used by the leader to influence others (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015).

Individualized Consideration: This aspect of transformational leadership denoted how the followers were known and understood at an individual and unique level about

personal strengths, weaknesses, and value added to the organization (Rana, Malik, & Hussain, 2016).

Inspirational Motivation: Transformational leaders could articulate the common goal by cultivating a mutual understanding to promote positive and potential expectations (Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015).

Intellectual Stimulation: Followers were encouraged and pushed to address ideas themselves through innovation and creativity as the transformational leader supported the use and development of their thinking for the good of the organization (Stump et al., 2016).

Leadership Behaviors: The traits or characteristics displayed by a leader demonstrating his/her leadership style, specifically what a leader does (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Rana et al., 2016).

Low Socioeconomic Status / Economically Disadvantaged Students: Students who qualified for free or reduced meals at school were determined through eligibility criteria: a family's annual income and number of family members by birth, marriage or adoption living in the household (Katz & Shah, 2017).

Poverty: Individuals who lacked the income to provide for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and access to healthcare (Nenadal & Mistry, 2018).

School Administrators: The individuals responsible for leading the operations of a school which included both principals and assistant principals (Donaldson, 2013).

Student Achievement: The acquisition and mastery of the desired knowledge and/or skills associated with student learning (Hagel, 2014).

Transformational Leadership: Leaders worked collaboratively with individuals and/or groups to create positive change through identifying issues, sharing a vision for the desired outcomes, and fostering plans that address the need in an encouraging and motivating manner (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Developing followers into leaders was a core tenet of this leadership approach. This leadership style was defined by applying the behaviors of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985).

Assumptions

The research study unfolded upon four assumptions. The first assumption was participants, including affected school administrators, understood the inquiries and had the appropriate context with which to respond. A second assumption was participants would be thoughtful and honest in responses. Quality in research through trustworthiness and dependability was essential because the outcomes influenced new knowledge (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). The design of the study assumed that administrators had enough knowledge of transformational leadership and followed the district mandate to implement the four related behaviors. Another assumption was school leaders reflected upon and shared experiences about transformational leadership behaviors from a critical lens to gather an in-depth understanding of responses. The final assumption was participants could articulate descriptions of leadership behaviors employed in schools in which most of the students are from impoverished households.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study encompassed administrators in three public schools in the southeastern regions of the United States and the analysis of viewpoints about perceived transformational leadership behaviors in public schools that had at least 50% of the student population receiving free and/or reduced lunch and showed successful outcomes in academic achievement. To facilitate transferability, descriptive statistics for each school were collected to record the number of years of administrative tenure, the size of the school, the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meals, the percentage of non-White students, the percentage of students with disabilities, and the percentage of English learners. The data points were used to describe the schools in the study. Furthermore, a delimitation of the study was that the population had been narrowed specifically to the southeastern United States comprising of only three public schools.

The study was not intended to point out concerns or negative effects related to transformational leadership. Also, its purpose was not to determine the effectiveness of any other leadership behaviors or classifying school administrators as ineffective for the purpose of evaluation.

Limitations

To begin the data collection process for the study, information was collected from the state's department of education and school websites to ascertain school level information and email addresses for potential participants. The sample size for the schools was outside of my control and could affect the study and ability to generalize for

larger populations; however, schools with similar populations might find transferability through the descriptive statistics.

Researchers conducting case studies must be aware of any biases that may be prevalent to ensure sensitivity and integrity to not affect the outcome (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Biases could occur naturally because I was an employee of the school district participating in the study. Because I was familiar with the professional learning of administrators and curriculum and instructional approach, interview questions were reviewed by another individual to ensure that those posed were open-ended and not leading to a desired outcome. To avoid any biases that could have influenced the results of the study, I focused on the research questions and practiced firm adherence to the data collection procedures.

Additionally, perceptions about leadership behaviors might not have fully aligned to transformational leadership presented in the background literature. The limitation might have inhibited participants from expressing ideas in accordance with the conceptual framework, expanding into other areas of interest. A small group of administrators participated in the study, so the lack of qualitative data from teachers could present a limitation in the findings. If this did indeed occur, perhaps a more in-depth analysis could be pursued through future research.

Significance

In the study, findings could contribute in understanding how transformational leadership behaviors of school leaders positively influence economically disadvantaged student achievement outcomes. Public schools did not consistently and pervasively

implement effective transformational leadership behaviors shown through prior research to positively impact student achievement (Kellar & Slayton, 2016; Mombourquette, 2017; Stump et al.). The research project was justified in literature. Research of effective transformational leadership behaviors in public schools where most students were from poverty was limited in previous studies, thus creating a gap in the existing knowledge. The influence of school administrators on instruction and student learning "is layered, complex, and, most importantly, bounded" (Donaldson, 2013, p. 842). The study will add new knowledge to the existing literature upon which future studies may build to extend school leadership and reform of systems and structures.

By researching the perspectives of administrators regarding personal leadership behaviors related to successful student achievement outcomes, impactful social change could be offered to influence other school leaders' behaviors. Social change was a platform for my scholarly research to expand the knowledge and skills for gaining insight to address the issues and challenges of today's society through evidence-based behaviors. The study identified areas in which school administrators could build personal professional capacity, knowledge, and skills to more effectively use transformational leadership behaviors. This aspect of supporting learning through effective transformational leadership behaviors might also contribute to student achievement increases in schools of disadvantaged contexts.

As accountability measures become more prevalent, continuous school improvement efforts should be aligned to evidenced-based behaviors (Woods & Martin, 2016). Hagel (2014) supported the idea school administrators could positively affect

student achievement, particularly in schools from disadvantaged areas, by being aware of his/her leadership behaviors and putting those into action by focusing on improvement. School leaders' roles are to guide and support positive school change. The outcomes of the study may also be used to inform school leadership programs and present considerations for school improvement.

Summary

Researchers suggested a relationship between transformational leadership and academic success of students (Baptiste, 2019; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Pan et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Transformational leadership had been studied extensively, particularly in organizations in need of substantive change. School leaders have a moral obligation to cultivate and propel opportunities for student and teacher success (Scheerens, 2012). Leaders did so by demonstrating behaviors related to transformational leadership that fostered systems level thinking, developed cultural perspective, and removed internal barriers and mitigated external ones (Pan et al., 2017). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors.

Chapter 2 of the study provides a critical review of the current literature supporting the conceptual framework of transformational leadership within the context of the educational setting. The research presented also involved peer-reviewed research

articles and seminal works on the impact of school leadership on student achievement and components that may change the outcomes of learning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Within Chapter 2, a scholarly review of the current literature relevant to the research study is presented and discussed. The literature review was organized into three overarching topics: (a) transformational leadership in schools, (b) the impact of school leadership, and (c) factors influencing student achievement. As articulated in Chapter 1, a gap existed in the literature studying the gaps associated in using effective leadership behaviors in public schools that included students from low-income households. Most studies were qualitative in method, set in urban or international locations, and assessed small sample sizes. Limited research occurred intentionally addressing transformational leadership behaviors of administrators from public schools in which most students came from impoverished backgrounds. The literature review shares how transformational leadership has impacted school settings, discusses the impact of school leadership on teacher effectiveness and student achievement, and highlights factors that may affect school improvement efforts. Detailed studies were reviewed, analyzed, and provided insight into the existing literature associated with the purpose of the study.

Literature Search Strategy

Electronic databases, including Academic Search Premier, ERIC, EBSCO, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis Group, Education Source, and Google Scholar, were exhausted to acquire the existing and relevant research. Advanced database searches of peer-reviewed journals and traditional printed books were used to ensure saturation of the literature. Advanced database searches were completed using two to three of the descriptive terms together (i.e., *transformational leadership, school principal, school*

administrator, low-income, poverty, student achievement, school improvement, barriers, supports, and *leadership*). The search produced over 18,000 articles analyzing various forms of school leadership and aspects of student achievement. In narrowing the scope aligned to the problem statement of the study, an analysis of the following articles proved relevant to this study. Every effort was made to ascertain the most current scholarly research on the subject; however, some earlier sources were consulted to establish depth in understanding of the concepts.

Transformational Leadership

Any discussion about effective leadership for the 21st century administrator started with the transforming leadership theory originated with the work of Burns (Tobin, 2014). Burns (1978) investigated how political leaders engaged with individuals through intentional vigor, potential, and ethical drive. Bass (1985) developed the work of Burns and changed the name to transformational leadership. With the four overarching behavioral components of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, transformational leadership emerged as a promising model to help schools respond to the evolving academic needs of students in new and different ways (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013; Tobin, 2014). This model pushed school administrators to take ownership of leadership behaviors to increase organizational effectiveness and go beyond the established standard to fulfill the needs of followers (Afshari, Bakar, Luan, & Siraj, 2012). Transformational leadership was more effective than the procedural problem solving of transactional leadership by focusing on people and organizational needs (Afshari et al., 2012). Aydin et al. (2013) posited

transformational leadership could be the best leadership behaviors in education to increase discourse, encourage cascading of the vision and mission, and add greatly towards developing the professional capacity of teachers as they facilitate learning. Administrators who exercised transformational leadership enhanced the overall conditions of schools, particularly the climate, and inspired stakeholders to support the improvement goals (Aydin et al., 2013; Gray & Lewis, 2013; Tobin, 2014). Those leaders focused on improvement worked to foster trusting relationships, demonstrate evidenced-based leadership, and centered attention on student learning.

Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017) posited that school leadership was an integral component in "creating and sustaining functional schools" (p. 629). Burns (1978) first established the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, explaining transforming leadership "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). The description of transformational leadership was further expanded by Bass (1990) as something occurring when leaders "broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group" (p. 21). This mindset created a greater sense of purpose and accountability among the team as challenges were considered and addressed.

Leaders had opportunities to apply both transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1988). The conceptualization consisted of six leadership factors:

inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire leadership (Bass, 1990). However, a noteworthy consideration was that transformational leadership was not a concept to be in isolation. As an example, the concept of transformational leadership used by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) included transactional behaviors and encompassed the following components: "Building school vision and goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; symbolizing professional behaviors and values; demonstrating high performance expectations; developing structures to foster participation in school decisions; staffing; instructional support; monitoring school activities; and community focus" (p. 114). Although the two leadership approaches differed, the common focus of both centered around leaders interacting with the people around them. Burns (1978) and Bass (1990) both emphasized that the premise of the leadership behaviors focused on leaders building the capacity of others on teams, using motivation to propel others toward change and ultimately transformation. Due to the reform behaviors inherent in transformational leadership, this style has been suggested as an ideal option for administrators leading school change. In considering the supports and barriers of pervasive implementation, more research was needed.

A greater understanding of the constructs of transformational leadership could give awareness of the behaviors in a school setting and how support might have been provided to school leaders while building a culture of continuous improvement (Oterkiil & Ertesvag, 2014). Leadership was only one factor affecting change; however, it might have been the most significant due to its influence on other factors. To create a school

culture focused on successful and sustainable change, administrators used effective leadership behaviors whereby teachers had ownership in the process. School leadership was a complex phenomenon with the acknowledgment regardless of how vast the knowledge base expanded, continual and extended study would be required.

The organizational mechanisms of school leaders relative to transformational leadership behaviors and the impact upon student achievement showed transformational leadership did impact the achievement measures when considering performance goals and stakeholder engagement (Sun & Henderson, 2017; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Training was encouraged for leaders in transformational leadership behaviors to align organizational processes to the leadership style and support meaningful feedback for performance goals. Collaborative structures and individuals' consideration had the most significant contributions on student achievement; however, more research on transformational leadership behaviors within the context of a school setting was recommended (Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

Researchers have advised not to underestimate the impact of school leadership on teaching. School leaders strongly influence the learning environment and that of the work of teachers and staff (Baptiste, 2019; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Studies had proven the structures and systems operationalized in schools could either nurture or hinder strong collaborative environments. Transformational leadership focuses on how leaders shape, guide, and empower staff (Scheerens, 2012). More specifically, transformational leaders "connected individual and collective action by not exercising power over people, but rather through them" (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016, p. 28). The leaders influenced from a

bottom-up approach, raised the capacity of teachers and motivated them to strive toward greater effectiveness of teaching and learning (Burns, 1978). In school leadership, four dimensions were added to the transformational leadership model of Bass (1985): modeling best behaviors, demonstrating high performance expectations, creating a productive school culture, and developing structures to foster teachers' participation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Administrators led teachers by inspiring toward a deeper sense of purpose in contributing to the transformation movement by working collectively to overcome challenges and achieve common goals (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019).

Vanblaere and Devos (2016) found that professional growth related to transformational leadership should be centered around coaching and motivating teachers, which could be a difficult challenge due to the interdependence of awareness, attitudes, and personal styles. Transformational leadership involves the construct of expectations necessitating all participants being on the same page (Litz & Scott, 2017). This belief should be set forth from the top and perpetuated throughout all aspects of the school environment. Another consideration is that successful distribution of leadership is likely to depend greatly on the collaborative nature among the leaders, whereby characteristics of openness, mutual trust, and communication exist (Cansoy, 2019; Wang, Wilhite, & Martino, 2016). Teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership were connected to participation in insightful dialogue and the existence of a collective responsibility (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

Transformational leaders pushed “to raise the consciousness of followers and to induce them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization” (Kwan,

2016, p. 112). Researchers maintained one of the main responsibilities of school leaders was to help create an environment that breed's teacher collaboration centered around the school's mission and vision. The six dimensions were building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, symbolizing professional behaviors and values, demonstrating high performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Some studies realigned the framework into three overarching dimensions: setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Setting directions included the leadership behaviors of building a common school vision, developing specific goals and priorities, and sustaining high expectations for performance. Providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, and modeling effective professional behaviors supported developing people. Organizational reform behaviors involved developing a collaborative school culture, creating systems and structures to foster shared decision making, and creating productive community partnerships. It could be challenging to strike a balance in school leadership realms to monitor teacher quality while keeping them engaged with an all-in mindset; therefore, transformational leadership could be a catalyst for the effective behaviors of instructional leadership through the development of a trusting school environment.

School leaders had substantive influence on teacher and student performance; therefore, transformational leadership qualities should be a priority to affect vision building, high student achievement, developing group goals, and professional

development (Balyer, 2012). Christiansen and Robey (2015) posited that the role of school leaders in setting the tone for the culture enables schools to transform into an environment focused on teacher and student learning, teaching, and operational structures of support. Transformational leadership behaviors call for creating a culture focused on learning through routine communication of the mission, vision, values, and goals; approaching curriculum focused on student learning and quality instruction; empowering teachers to view themselves as leaders; providing teachers with needed information and staff development to make decisions that promote learning; and facilitating systems enabling collaborative work focused on teaching and learning (Woods & Martin, 2016). Administrators set high standards for learning and motivated people to achieve through teamwork.

Transformational leadership involved behaviors in which administrators engaged and solicited team members to become actively involved in assessing the needs of the school culture for improvement through building a shared vision and mission (Damanik & Aldridge, 2017). The intellectual stimulation component refers to a leader who ignites extra effort among his or her followers to rethink ideas, to challenge existing ways of doing things, and to reframe problems (Wang et al., 2016). Damanik and Aldridge (2017) referenced the importance of professional interactions in building trust and engaging with staff members. This practice emphasized how administrators model expectations for interactions with and among other staff members. Participatory decision making was attributed to how a school leader sought staff involvement in decision making and empowered the distribution of leadership among the staff members (Johnson et al., 2014).

As a school leader promoted this participation, he/she also developed a common language and understanding of values, which strengthened the school's organizational culture as evidenced through its norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions (Damanik & Aldridge, 2017). The individualized support dimension was about how the leader considers his/her followers relative to varied needs and capacities. This dimension was evaluative as to whether the leader demonstrated compassion, strong coaching, and mentorship. The moral perspective dimension referred to the administrator's personal characteristics and whether he/she behaves in ways that were reflected by the beliefs and values championed by the school. While the concept of leadership involved influencing others, leadership style was the art of influencing other individuals toward a direction for the common good.

According to Day and Sammons (2013), school principals had often been described as the conclusive factor for matters of school improvement in prior literature; however, evidence suggested school leaders were restricted by numerous demands of time and that, consequently, limited influence or were resolved by inner school factors (Easley & Tulowitzki, 2016). The school administrators could directly affect the school environment relative to culture, climate, or organizational structure. These aspects of leadership roles in turn were connected to student performance. The findings of Easley and Tulowitzki (2016) demonstrated administrators strongly influenced the work setting, innovation capacity, and motivation of staff, enabling teachers to instruct students and meet learners' needs. Thus, leaders who were directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment constructs and those who

directly monitored the classroom behaviors of teachers, had influence on the probability of teachers changing instructional mindsets.

Litz and Scott (2017) promoted creating a shared vision, improving effectiveness, establishing high expectations, and building instructional capacity as necessary elements of strong leadership to achieve positive change. They posited that transformational leadership focuses on results and underscores success. This leadership style, developed by Burns (1978), was recognized as a process that led to operationalizing transformation through increasing achievement and motivation of followers. Change took place through the diligence of motivated followers to achieve success (Bass, 1985, 2000). Burke (2013) found change theory grounded in knowledge of the human behavior could explain the evolution of organizations in which transformational leadership became the norm. Effective transformational leaders influence shared beliefs and values building a level of change that is absolute and comprehensive while being more likely than transactional leaders to take risks and produce trust (Bass & Avolio, 1990). The leaders expanded the abilities of individuals who collectively nurtured a school culture oriented focused on learning. As a result, learning grew into a shared responsibility. Change in school culture influenced the school environment itself. Teachers adapting to a new leadership would inevitably be a challenge; however, intentionality and emphasis on gradual changes to the organizational culture and school framework with collaborative engagement and open dialogue, teachers would more than likely demonstrate participation in the process and adapted to the newness expected of them.

School leadership was essential to the success of school organizations (Quin et. al, 2015). Administrators were rated second to teachers in the improvement of student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015); and according to McKibben (2013), school leaders might be responsible for up to 25% of the variance in student learning. A transformational leader buffers teachers from external distractions by supporting collaboration of teachers and providing individualized support and consideration (Dutta & Sahney, 2016). When led with a transformational style, teachers voluntarily followed administrators' direction by taking ownership of shared improvement goals and basing decisions on systematic data collection directly related to classroom instructional behaviors (Yoon, 2016). In this new era of increased accountability, administrators were expected to show substantial academic growth for all students and marked improvement in achievement. Researchers noted a limited amount of research was conducted on the differences in the leadership behaviors of school leaders in organizations with varying performance outcomes (Scheerens, 2012). The lack of research shows a need to investigate leadership from high performing schools to better understand the behaviors required to generate positive change and remove obstacles to the work.

Leadership is based on relationships, and "relationships in schools – from classroom relationships between students and teachers, to teacher-administrator relationships, to school-community relationships – influences everything teachers and other school leaders sought to accomplish through schooling" (Waite, 2014, p. 1202). School administrators learn to balance the efforts with teachers, students, and community members, while working to strengthen the overall school environment (Xu, Wubbena, &

Stewart, 2016). Waite suggested this challenge is in large part reflective of an increased emphasis on transactional processes in managing schools by way of accountability, standardized curriculum, high-stakes testing, performance-based pay, and punitive measures (Waite, 2014). Transactional conditions create a chasm in the teacher workforce, and transformational leadership behaviors are needed to help offset the adverse effects of a pure transactional model. The results of negative effects include a prescribed instructional approach (Waite, 2014), low teacher efficacy (Vieluf, Kunter, & van de Vijver, 2013), and teacher burnout.

According to Zeinabadi (2014), school leaders were instrumental in triggering positive relationships and high leverage behaviors in schools. School leaders should focus on cultivating relationships that are professional, supportive, truthful, and intentional; and those who did so with teachers proved to be well liked, respected, and trusted. The administrator relationships impact teacher growth by working for the advancement of the school, teachers, and students rather than for themselves while establishing a culture of care and enjoyment. Transformational leadership was the most crucial predictor of impactful and high-quality transfer of teachers' instructional practices (Zeinabadi, 2014).

One of the most significant and influential leadership models in education proved to be transformational leadership (Bush, 2014). Berkovich (2016) found the relevance of the theory to the current challenges encountered by school administrators. Transformational leadership is important within the structure of decision making as certain behaviors overlap with factors that promoted data, such as creating a shared vision (Stump et al., 2016). The strength of transformational leadership exists in its focus on

changing the organization through behaviors used by the leader work to influence team members to pursue one direction or implement a practice in place of another (Kellar & Slayton, 2016); however, the transformational leadership behaviors of school administrators should be studied more closely to determine whether differences exist between or within single dimensions (Stump et al., 2016). Educational leadership evolved and allowed for in-depth exploration of the subtle aspects of leadership in fostering transformative organizational change (Daniels et al., 2019). This need to expand our approach in studying leadership was intended to help explain what a leader could accomplish in his/her role.

Impact of School Leadership

A school leadership effectiveness structure could not be determined without first identifying what the administrator's role in the school was (Zheng et al., 2017). After classroom instruction, school leaders were the second most influential school-related factor affecting student achievement as they focused the priorities on teaching and learning (Radinger, 2014; Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). Administrators played a crucial role in establishing the expectations of teacher quality and measuring effectiveness. School leaders leveraged relationships to foster stronger classroom practice and created supportive learning environments for both teachers and students (Louis, 2015). Accountability in student learning for all socioeconomic groups, learner profiles, and racial backgrounds continued for administrators and schools (Brown, Bynum, & Beziat, 2017; Shin, Slater, & Backhoff, 2013). Although accountability for student performance outcomes was in place, Kruger and Scheerens (2012) found that school leadership

affected student achievement indirectly and that relationship remained largely unknown. As a result, reform efforts that proved successful required a greater understanding of the factors influencing the relationship among leadership and achievement (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016). Leaders who actively focused on redesign of the organizational framework promote collaboration and participation, while those who sought to directly affect the instructional program place emphasis on monitoring and support of classroom teaching. These behaviors in isolation might have narrowed the scope of school leadership (Kruger & Scheerens, 2012). Whereas leadership did not directly impact student achievement, studies showed school leadership directly influencing teacher motivation and behaviors, which in turn shaped student outcomes.

School administrators creating cultures of confidence and trust helped provoke teachers to strive for a greater concentration on effort and achievement and work better with one another to solve the challenges faced (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) found a direct correlation between school leader trustworthiness, leadership behaviors, and student achievement. Administrators worked within a diverse community, made up of varied groups, subgroups, and individuals which include teachers, parents, community members, staff, and students, who were often competing if not conflicting.

Leadership might have a significant impact on school improvement efforts and student learning. According to Pan et al. (2017), the relationship was achieved as school leaders shape the systems and structured building a capacity for change while nurturing effective teaching and learning behaviors. Transformational school leaders also designed

environments conducive to learning for all school members; however, administrators faced challenges as they work to move schools forward. Often, conflicts presented among old and new thoughts of learning and the lack of professional knowledge of administrators impeded conversations with teachers. School leaders struggled to capitalize on the importance of building learning communities focused on organizational change and improved student learning outcomes by engaging teachers in purposeful collaborative and nurturing supportive relationships.

Transformational school leaders analyzed both organizational strengths and weaknesses to better identify areas of needed improvement and proactively plan for essential changes (Yoon, 2016). Administrators' utilization of data and the ways in which they communicated with teachers became vital components to ensure effective implementation of the reform movement. Strong evidence given to teachers helped build a better understanding of the learning progression and in turn facilitated openness to new initiatives while strengthening implementation. Because changes did not always produce the expected results, the role of teacher perception in schools, and how it shaped the extent to which reforms were implemented to fidelity, should be considered. Concerning school reform outcomes, data-driven administrators were more positively related to teachers' perception, which was critical in understanding the relationships between school leadership, teacher practice, and students' academic achievement (Yoon, 2016). Researchers increasingly acknowledged the claim a leadership's impact on learning was accomplished indirectly by shaping conditions that influenced effective teaching and learning (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

Administrators who exercised effective leadership behaviors could recognize instructional strategies connecting teachers' classroom behaviors that determined students' strengths and weaknesses with individualized levels of needed support (Muthler, 2015). Also, administrators adjusted leadership behaviors to support innovation, collaboration, diverse thinking, reflection, and professionalism to improve academic achievement (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). The school leader should demonstrate quality leadership behaviors that build a trusting and supportive school community by being fair, firm, and consistent. Influential school leaders established clear expectations and structured plans allowing individuals to successfully execute the plans. Administrators did so by supporting teachers in maximizing potential individually, organizing the school to improve effectiveness, and sharing the responsibility as data-focused and data-driven leaders.

From the perspective of influencing student achievement, researchers established teachers and administrators in this order as more reliable sources of data (Shen, Ma, Cooley, & Burt, 2016). School leaders propagated teacher empowerment by providing opportunities for shared decision-making, improving the school climate, establishing positive communication mechanisms, and building relationships of trust (Balyer, Ozcan, & Yildiz, 2017). However, leadership struggled to support the self-efficacy of teachers in growing professional capacity, having freedom in instructional methods, or delegating leadership responsibilities (Mora-Whitehurst, 2013). Because teachers had a direct influence on increased student achievement, administrators should cultivate an

environment that empowered teachers through a supportive learning environment (Shin et al., 2013).

Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) and Huguet (2017) offered research about school leadership behaviors promoting school-wide reform efforts. The importance of school leadership instituting systems, structures, and processes to support teacher and student success was expressed in prior research (Klar & Brewer, 2013; Shatzer et al., 2014). Specific elements promoting leadership development occurred by creating a common vision and mission, building relationships that cultivate trust, planning for student-centered collaboration, providing professional development for teachers, and distributed leadership.

Teachers engaged in a collaborative culture when they felt valued and respected through aspects of shared and supportive leadership behaviors (Carpenter, 2015). Aspects of the school structures that focused on a collective purpose and values, a collaborative culture, the problem-solving process, and continuous improvement promoted distributed leadership and built leadership capacity for school reform (Klar, Huggins, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2016). Administrators who demonstrated success were motivated to build capacity due to the needs of teachers and students by pointing to four phases in the cultivation of leadership process – identification of potential leaders, creation of leadership opportunities, facilitation of a transition in roles, and continuous support (Klar et al., 2016). While this research provides a foundation for the necessity of the relationship between distributed leadership and leadership development, professional development opportunities should focus upon growing leadership capacity in others

through careful analysis of the school contextual features, leadership strategies, leader characteristics, and transitions in leadership styles (Sammons et al., 2014).

Without distributed leadership and administrators as capacity builders, little focus could be given to facilitating and monitoring the learning environment due to the many administrative duties assigned to school leaders (Balyer, 2014). Although teachers were cited as the most direct influence, administrators affected all teachers and students within a school (Branch et al., 2013). Mombourquette (2017) emphasized the administrator's necessity in understanding the importance of identifying a shared vision, communicating vision, centering the efforts of the school community on achieving the vision, and celebrating successes. Sun and Leithwood (2015) cautioned, however, "there is much yet to learn about how leadership influences student outcomes, and considerable research was needed before such learning could be 'codified' in a way that might be directly useful to practicing school leaders" (p. 517). The behaviors of the school leader to transform a school community encompassed learning to lead, trusting in time, making connections, and managing change through personnel decisions and institutional structures that support learning (Watson & Bogotch, 2016). Administrators may have difficulty in establishing priorities without an intentional focus on teaching and learning.

A central debate in organizational research of educational settings was centered on who participated in school leadership (Sebastian, Huang, & Allensworth, 2017). Teachers assumed a variety of leadership roles in schools, either formally and informally and both directly and indirectly with colleagues, while supporting the school leader's mission, goals, and initiatives. Teachers wanted to take on leadership responsibilities but

expected administrators to offer forethought and guidance (Johnson et al., 2014). Decades of research on school leadership led to a comprehensive and exhaustive body of work suggesting school leadership's behaviors of establishing organizational systems and process was indirectly related to student achievement (Dumay, Boonen, & Van Damme, 2013). Administrators assumed numerous operational responsibilities beyond administration and management, participation in teaching and learning, and external and internal engagement with various stakeholders (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Effective administrator and teacher leadership placed an emphasis on the school climate, particularly in the areas of safety and teacher's expectations (Sebastian et al., 2017). Administrators improved the learning climate of the school by providing structures for removing barriers of teachers, guiding and supporting work, and monitoring the success of efforts. Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang (2016) linked student achievement growth using data in elementary schools to administrator and teacher leadership. Opportunities for teachers to assume leadership responsibilities were also significant among school leadership and student achievement in establishing the learning climate.

Factors Influencing Student Achievement

Most children attending public school in the southeastern United States live in poverty, and socioeconomic status is a major factor contributing to student achievement gaps (Rickman, 2015). Those from impoverished backgrounds are not always prepared for school and may enter with learning deficiencies, thus creating an achievement gap in comparison to academic peers (Blair & Raver, 2014). Numerous factors can be related to poverty, such as students' physical and mental health and wellbeing; language

development; access to resources; family engagement in learning; teacher effectiveness; and mobility level. Poverty negatively influenced student achievement (Judge, 2013; Ladd, 2012). Hagans and Good (2013) found the strongest predictor of low student performance to be the socioeconomic factor of poverty.

Low socioeconomic status could impact the literacy development of children due to the limited language environment in the home and the lack of exposure to print materials (Fletcher, 2017; Slater et al., 2014). Holliday et al. (2014) demonstrated "more hours in childcare, better health status, higher parent education, and use of English (in addition to one's native language) at home improve resilience in children in poverty at the start of kindergarten" (p. 142). Families in poverty had heightened rates of challenges, "such as low levels of parental education and elevated family stress," that often diminish support for early childhood "cognitive and social–emotional development" (Lee & Bierman, 2015, p. 384). Rogers, Labadie, and Pole (2016) stated "intentionally creating space and time for children to respond to books would support literacy development" (p. 40). Without practice in reading text, students' reading fluency, vocabulary development, and critical comprehension could be inhibited (Chafel & Neitzel, 2012). Once early reading skills were established, a platform on which to expand further learning was provided; conversely, if a child began elementary school behind, the student might have struggled to stay on track with his/her similar academic peers (Comber, 2014). Not only was the income gap widening but the achievement gap in student performance persisted (Rickman, 2015). Schippers (2014) shared, "The gap in skill development between

advantaged and disadvantaged children emerges early and can predict academic achievement in later years" (p. 42). Hiebert and Mesmer (2013) found:

> increasing the pressure on the primary grades—without careful work that indicates why the necessary levels are not attained by many more students—may have consequences that could widen a gap that is already too large for the students who, at present, are left out of many careers and higher education. (p. 49)

Without early intervention, children born into low socioeconomic settings might have struggled to catch up to peers, drop out of school, and not fare well in the job market which results in a continual cycle of poverty (Schippers, 2014). More rigorous learning expectations had been enacted to better equip students for the "high-powered careers" of the future and to level the playing field across the nation (VanTassel-Baska, 2015, p. 61). As a result, increased accountability measures were promoting college and career readiness with benchmarks of literacy expectations established throughout a student's educational journey. Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill, and Snow (2012) asserted changing the standards alone would not help impoverished children reach the new levels of literacy required for the economy of today and the future; also, the quality of teaching should also be addressed through appropriate assessments leading to effective instructional behaviors.

A child's academic success was related to classroom teaching practices; effective, high-quality instruction may have diminished socioeconomic gaps in literacy development (Lee & Bierman, 2015). The potential outcomes for students with lower socioeconomic status might have resulted in lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and increased learning gaps progressing through the grade levels (Nichols &

Nichols, 2014). According to the study conducted by Schwartz, Schmitt, and Lose (2012), struggling readers required effective support considered "teacher-student ratio, teachers' professional expertise, the students' entering literacy level, and the types and timing of interventions available within the system" (p. 565). The school-based challenge in supporting impoverished students pointed to the curriculum design, methods for instruction, implementation of the classroom behaviors, and professional development needs (Carta et al., 2015).

The phenomenon of high-poverty, failing schools existed in urban, rural, and suburban areas nation-wide (Brown & Green, 2014). Brown and Green (2014) found that successful leaders understood roles and focused on building the necessary relationships promoting change in the school's organizational structure. The school leaders were also able to clearly define and communicate the behaviors related to the school's transformation (Sammons et al., 2014). Though high-poverty and underachieving schools persisted, school administrators continued searching for systems and structures that maximized high leverage and evidenced based practices with the expectation of improving the academic achievement of students and supporting the teachers they served.

Blair and Raver (2014) stressed the importance of child-centered educational intervention programs at the onset of one's learning experience to overcome disadvantages associated with poverty. The potential impact of poverty on student learning was affected through the role of executive functions and regulatory behaviors (Miller, Pavlakis, Lac, & Hoffman, 2014). School administrators could mitigate these factors by focusing on the necessity of quality hiring practices, staff support, parent

feedback, data analysis, and outside resources (Blair & Raver, 2014). This information added greater insight to the leadership behaviors associated with social, public, and education policies to positively affect supporting students from low-income households.

Effective school leadership that cultivated professional learning, accountability, expert capacity in literacy, and ongoing data analysis, yielded a positive influence on the reading achievement of students in low socioeconomic schools (Fletcher et al., 2013). Success in reading was contingent upon a variety of components and indirect factors; however, specific challenges of students from high-poverty settings were associated with fluency, semantic knowledge, and vocabulary (Conradi, Amendum, & Liebfreund, 2016).

Francois (2014) offered insight into the school factors that could affect students' reading achievement. This qualitative project studied one school's journey as it successfully improved the literacy outcomes of students. The administrator led the staff in improving the core instructional program through building personal and professional growth, communicating expectations, developing structures to support collaboration of staff, and expanding accountability through both school-wide progress and individual responsibility. The results of this research expanded the idea that school leaders should take an active role in enabling and sustaining change to promote student success in literacy.

Acquisition of early literacy skills and access to reading materials for children from low-income households benefitted reading achievement (Holliday et al., 2014; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016). A joint partnership might be accomplished by equipping families with literacy practice skills, providing print and digital reading materials in the

home, and exposing children to language nutrition through social interactions (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016). Administrators and teachers should take a collective responsibility to ensure a partnership is created to bridge the gap between school and home, particularly those from low socioeconomic status.

Mesmer and Hiebert (2015) indicated the importance of recognizing how third graders are transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn. This stage required the comprehension of complex texts, and the inability to navigate this signaled a consequent struggle in secondary school. Readers' prior knowledge was found to be one of the most critical influences on reading outcomes (Britton & Graesser, 2014). The authors felt as though the content of the text influenced student outcomes as a result of the text complexity and lack of background experiences. School leaders were urged to examine how students, especially those in high-poverty communities, were responding to the increase in expectations of text complexity. Leithwood and Azah (2017) explored mission, visions, and goals; instructional systems; data usage; improvement processes; professional development; leadership development; and relationships among stakeholder groups; yet determined additional study should take place at the school level learning more about the mechanisms and variables promoting improvement.

Summary and Conclusions

In the literature review, I examined the conceptual framework of transformational leadership in schools, how an effective administrator leads school improvement, and factors impacting the achievement of students, particularly those from a low socioeconomic home environment. The literature review considered numerous attributes

of an effective school leader. However, researchers determined a single characteristic cannot advance school effectiveness. The leadership behaviors of a school leader were key elements in cultivating a cohesive and collegial learning environment focused on building professional capacity. The behaviors and beliefs of the administrator were key factors to developing a collaborative environment of continued professional growth in which relationships with staff were built on trust, and a school culture fostered success for all students and teachers. It also included distributed leadership with the teaching staff encouraging shared processes in decision-making of promoting and supporting organizational change.

Synthesis of studies concluded the necessity for transformational leadership in schools to advance student academic outcomes. Transformational leaders set high performance targets creating alignment for clear direction in the school, intentionally focused on teaching and learning. Transformational leaders prioritized and structured support aligned to achieving the goals. Leadership capacity extended well beyond the school administrators as time was afforded for collaboration and professional growth. Lastly, administrators focused on building a build positive school culture propagating high expectations while celebrating and championing success of the individual and the team.

In Chapter 3, I will explain the research methodology that will be used for the study and provide the process for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Method

According to a 2018 [REDACTED] Department of Education report, three public schools in the southeastern United States advanced the academic achievement outcomes for students from low socioeconomic households. The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore how the administrators of impoverished schools whose students demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. The comprehensive analysis was intended to yield informative explanations of how the phenomenon of interest, the leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to the successful academic achievement of students from poverty.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the study's methodology designed to expand upon the research method. The following sections will be included: Setting, Research Design & Rationale, Role of the Researcher, and Methodology. Trustworthiness, Threats to Validity, and Ethical Procedures will also be discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary providing an overview of the methodology, data collection, and research analysis process.

Research Design and Rationale

The demands of leading high poverty schools increased the importance of having an effective leader (Branch et al., 2013). Though efforts were underway for some time to address the needs of disadvantaged learners, researchers recommended schools change the mindset from focusing on the lack of student skills to that of strong leadership and instructional expertise (Stone-Johnson, 2014). School districts were concerned that

administrators may have been struggling to meet the needs of teachers and support the learning of students from low-income households.

Students' socioeconomic status had the strongest correlation to cognitive scores than any other factor in the research literature (Hanover Research, 2014). Low socioeconomic status students continued to struggle with literacy development, comprehension, and vocabulary (Mesmer & Hiebert, 2015; Smith et al., 2014). According to a 2018 report by [REDACTED] Department of Education, 60% percent of elementary economically disadvantaged students, over 50% of middle grades economically disadvantaged students, and over 45% of high school economically disadvantaged students were not meeting the literacy benchmark in the southeastern United States; while 60% of children attending public school in the state lived in poverty (Suitts, 2015).

Research suggested of all the school-influenced factors contributing to student achievement; leadership was second in strength only to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Woods & Martin, 2016). Effective school leadership requires an individual to understand the complexity of the components and manage each associated with difficult environments and poverty (Klar & Brewer, 2013). According to Zheng et al. (2017), an administrator is responsible for establishing the priorities for teaching and learning in his/her school, and data did not serve as evidence that school leaders in the region determined effective transformational leadership behaviors that mediated instruction for struggling, low-income students.

The following research questions (RQs) guided the study:

RQ1: How do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement describe personal transformational leadership behaviors?

RQ2: What do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement perceive as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors?

Through the study, I sought to explain how the central phenomenon of interest, the leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to the successful academic achievement of students from low-income backgrounds. In choosing the qualitative case study design for the study, I sought to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States with successful academic achievement described transformational leadership behaviors in addressing the phenomenon (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Woods & Martin, 2016; Zheng et al., 2017). The behaviors were critiqued through the conceptual lens of transformational leadership theory. A qualitative methodology using the case study design established school administrators' current transformational leadership behaviors and perceived supports to leadership behaviors.

Qualitative research involves different orientations and approaches in different philosophical assumptions. The ontological assumption of qualitative study claims that reality is subjective and varied due to the different lens of each participant in the study, and the epistemological assumption is based upon the understanding that the researcher interacts with the participants (Babbie, 2017). Diverse orientations, approaches, and

assumptions produce new data collection and strategies for analysis. These different views on what is known, what may be known, and how it is known solicits an assertion that more than one way to conduct qualitative research is possible (Burkholder et al., 2016). However, it is important to acknowledge that the purpose behind a qualitative study is to analyze social behaviors and interactions of people and contexts through processes and constructs. Interpretive approaches focused on naturalistic methods through interviewing, observation, and analysis in order to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality (Burkholder et al., 2016). Knowledge emerged from the research process. While qualitative research requires a deep intensity and effort, it allows for the opportunity of discovery about the experiences, thoughts, ideas, and reflections of both the researcher and the participants.

The qualitative methodology using case study design allows a researcher to collect data through in-depth interviewing to investigate the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Case study research originated from an interpretive paradigm in which the researcher sought to answer how and why questions (Singh, 2014). Researchers employing the case study design also introduce suspicions and provide insight into the phenomenon by offering rich descriptions of processes and individuals' experiences that the researcher could not obtain using quantitative data (Yin, 2013). The case study design is used by researchers to analyze structures and processes, obtain a thorough understanding of a group or situation, and give an exhaustive description of a phenomenon in context (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Through the study, I intended to find the how, about leadership behaviors, and the why, concerning the reason schools experienced academic success with students from impoverished backgrounds (see Yin, 2014). The explanatory case study was used to seek answers to questions at a surface and deep level that could explain a connection between the phenomenon and the cause that were too complex for experimental strategies (see Yin, 2013). Also, I sought to explain the phenomenon in the data as a procedure of inquiry into transformational leadership behaviors (see Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative researchers seek to understand how things work by examining a few situational experiences in a deep and contemplative manner by looking for patterns and themes that may emerge (Babbie, 2017). Assuming the role as researcher in the study, I investigated school administrators' descriptions of current transformational leadership behaviors and perceived supports to leadership behaviors.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in the study, my role was comprised of reviewing literature about transformational leadership and effective school leadership, studying protocols for collecting data, interviewing participants, taking notes, transcribing data, analyzing transcripts and personal reflections, reviewing archival documentation, conducting data analysis to arrive at a conclusion, and reporting the findings from the research. As an educator for over 20 years, I have served in multiple roles, including teacher, curriculum specialist, assistant principal, principal, director, and currently as an assistant superintendent. As I had been employed as an administrator in a variety of settings, primarily those with high low socioeconomic populations, I understood the roles of

school administrators. While this might have been the case, each school posed its own unique and diverse characteristics which impact leaders' experiences.

As the researcher, I ensured methods were focused on observations of social phenomenon in a natural setting (see Babbie, 2017). My primary role as researcher was to collect and analyze data from participating administrators considering reflexivity in my identity, positionality, and subjectivities (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). No relationships involving power between myself and participants existed; therefore, ethical issues were minimized in the nature of the study. Although participants may have known me as a colleague, I included a statement in the letter of invitation to differentiate my role as student researcher. To further minimize bias and remain neutral, it was my intention to not use background knowledge of the individual or situation in analyzing responses of participants. I approached the questioning without any preconceived notions of expected outcomes.

During the individual interview session, the participant was considered the expert, and I was the learner by asking probing questions and ascertaining experiences, reflections, and feedback on the issue. I was obligated to be responsible in being honest, not pressuring the participants, and treating the individual with respect from beginning to end (see Babbie, 2017). The researcher-participant relationships remained professional and unbiased, asking only questions directly related to the study. School administrators were asked to review transcripts of the interviews for accuracy. I used further member-checking processes to ensure administrators' responses were clearly understood to

minimize misconceptions. Participants were also provided draft findings to check interpretation of personal data included in the findings and for viability in the setting.

In order to give a thorough and accurate perspective of the phenomenon being studied, my goal as researcher was to remain neutral and objective throughout the entire process. If at any time during the data collection I felt biased, I discussed this with my chairperson to receive guidance and move back to a more neutral position.

Methodology

I used a qualitative methodology using the case study design to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States with successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. Following, the study is explained including details relative to participant selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and data analysis plan.

Participant Selection

The sites for the study were public schools in a district in the southeastern United States. According to [REDACTED] Department of Education in 2018, over 60% of the students qualified for free or reduced meal prices. The public-school district had over 5,000 students enrolled in the 2017-2018 school year. The demographics of the school district included 60% minority and 40% Caucasian. Over 8% of students were English learners and over 10% were students with disabilities.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a sample is derived from a larger population based on specified criteria. For purposive sampling, the researcher determines

a group with the needed characteristics (Babbie, 2017). While purposive sampling does not yield the same degree of generalization as random sampling, this selective method was the best option for my study due to time and fiscal constraints associated with the study. The prospective participants chosen for the study included only current administrators within the school district who demonstrated success in academic achievement of students from low-income households; therefore, homogeneous sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, was chosen based on the school leaders being members in a group with similar characteristics (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The desired criteria for the study was based on the following criteria: (a) 3 or more years of experience as a school administrator and (b) current school administrator. Fourteen administrators from three schools in the district were selected as participants for the study. Administrators received an invitation to take part in the study by email. A consent form also accompanied the invitation. When school administrators agreed to participate, they were expected to respond to the emailed consent form stating consent before the interviews.

Instrumentation

Selection of appropriate instrumentation was an integral component when considering the purpose of a case study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the study, semistructured interviews and personal reflections were selected as the sources for gathering data. All instruments used were appropriate in gathering information to answer the research questions thoroughly.

Face-to-face semistructured interviews. Meaningful and purposeful interviewing could lead to rich, thick, deep, personalized, and contextualized data

(Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Babbie (2017) stated, "A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (p. 319). The qualitative interview process is about focusing on specific questions that analyzed at a deep understanding of the topic while respecting the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A productive qualitative interview enables the researcher to listen for rich and detailed information, posed open-ended questions, and allows for a flexible process of questioning to gain more understanding from the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By establishing a trusting relationship, asking questions skillfully, and listening actively, I could create the right conditions for a participant to speak openly and honestly. I used strong and rigorous research procedures while painting a relationship to establish comfort with the participant to maximize contribution to the study (see Babbie, 2017).

An interview guide served as a template to guide me and remind me of appropriate questions that were open-ended and not leading. Participants took part in an interview comprised of 11 open-ended questions (Appendix A). By crafting questions that used specific language, the tool helped to ensure I was asking questions that would elicit more in-depth responses from participants. Using the conventional interview approach of one-on-one interaction between participant and researcher, administrators provided insight by sharing personal descriptions of leadership behaviors in public schools in which most of students were from impoverished households, which provided enough data to examine the problem.

The interview guide was developed using the four facets of transformational leadership behaviors which include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (see Bass & Avolio, 1994, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006). The open-ended questions were formatted to ascertain descriptions of administrators' current transformational leadership behaviors and supports to personal leadership behaviors (see Table 1).

Table 1

Research Questions and Related Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. How do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement describe personal transformational leadership behaviors?	1, 2, 3, 4
2. What do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful personal achievement perceive as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors?	5, 6, 7, 8

Personal reflection. Each participant had the opportunity to complete a short reflection survey to reflect on personal leadership behaviors (Appendix B). An adapted version of the survey entitled, *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ) was used for data collection (see Bass & Avolio, 2004). Permission to use the MLQ was obtained through a remote online survey license, enabling the ability to retype, reformat, and score the instrument. Whereas the MLQ was a tool developed by Bass and Avolio (2004) to

measure transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership; only the transformational leadership components would be used for the purposes of the study. The tool was tested multiple times in more than 30 countries for reliability and validity in both public and private organizations regarding performance measures of both ratings and organization outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 2004). The MLQ had been used in educational settings to measure the transformational leadership behaviors of school leaders and was found to be both valid and reliable (Menon, 2014; Xu et al., 2016).

The use of the personal reflection survey allowed me to gain an understanding of how school administrators viewed personal leadership behaviors relative to those of transformational leadership (see Table 2). Administrators rated themselves ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 = not at all, 1 = once in a while, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, and 4 = frequently if not always. To assess perceptions of leadership behaviors, researchers used the MLQ extensively (Bass & Avolio, 2004).

Table 2

Transformational Leadership Behaviors and Related Descriptive Statements

Transformational Leadership Behaviors	Related Descriptive Statements
Idealized Influence	2, 6, 8, 10
Inspirational Motivation	4, 5, 11, 16
Intellectual Simulation	1, 3, 13, 15
Individual Consideration	7, 9, 12, 14

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

A letter of cooperation was obtained from the school district granting permission to authorize me to recruit school administrators for participation, collect data through one-on-one interviews and personal reflection surveys, send transcripts to participants of responses to the interview questions to ensure accuracy of personal responses and viability in the setting through member checking, and disclose the study's findings and recommendations to participants. Following approval of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (#07-11-19-0645572), school administrators were recruited to participate in the qualitative case study. Participants were notified of the study through email notification. The notification outlined the procedures, purpose of the study, and rights of participants. Individuals were asked to respond within 5 days of receipt, and participants were also notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Administrators gave consent to participating in the case study by responding to the email, and a signed copy of the consent form was obtained at the face-to-face interview. Once the individual responded by email, a date and time was selected to review the consent form in person and conduct the interview. Should a participant be unable to meet in person, a telephone interview could have been scheduled. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in the same manner.

Each participant interview was anticipated to last 45 to 60 minutes. To maximize the ability to gain rich, deep personal insights from the participants, the one-on-one interview method was chosen rather than another type of interviewing, such as focus groups. Each face-to-face interview occurred at the participant's workplace in a quiet

area, free from interruption if possible; however, a phone interview would have been granted if the participant chooses that option. By completing the interview at the participant's workplace, he/she could access any needed resources or references when responding to questions. Recording the interviews ensured that the analysis included all detailed responses shared by the participants. In order to provide clarification of responses to the questions, I recorded brief notes during the interviews when possible. Administrators were then asked to complete a reflective survey at the end of the interview on paper. At the conclusion of the scheduled appointment, the purpose of the study was reiterated. No plans for follow-up interviews or treatments for participants took place.

Following the interviews, the digitally recorded contents were transcribed into statements within one week of the scheduled discussion. Participants were allowed to review the transcripts to ensure discrepancies were avoided and intentions were accurately captured. A copy of the transcribed interviews was emailed to participants, and confirmation of agreement was solicited through a reply email. Once initial interpretation of the interview had been completed, participants were contacted a second time via email to review the draft findings to check for accuracy of interpretation of personal data used in the findings and for viability in the setting.

Data Analysis Plan

The strength of qualitative inquiry is that it produces substantive data committed to the integrity of participants' viewpoint and provides multiple perspectives of meaning in relation to the phenomena of social change being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers who use the case study method collected, analyzed, summarized, and

interpreted data simultaneously while doing research (Yin, 2014). In data analysis, meaningful data presented by participants would be used to generate responses to research questions of the study (Babbie, 2017). Analysis of the data was intended to gather perceptions of a specific group of public school administrators by investigating descriptions of personal transformational leadership behaviors and supports to leadership behaviors.

Using the specific data tools of face-to-face interviews and personal reflections, research questions posed in the study could be thoroughly addressed. Each instrument served an intended purpose in the research process and provided data necessary for in-depth analysis. Research questions were the focus of the study while concentrating on the conceptual framework of transformational leadership style as defined by a set of behaviors (Bass, 1985). All data tools had been developed and were chosen with these areas of focus in mind (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Coding and analysis. Creswell (2013) promoted steps in analyzing data from qualitative research, which included collecting data, preparing data for analysis by transcribing notes, reading through data to gain a basic understanding, coding data by locating text segments and assigning code labels, coding text for description, and coding text for themes. Each data source was coded to ensure that analysis was in-depth and exhaustive. Relationships among individual codes were generated into categories as patterns or commonalities emerged for each data source (Saldana, 2016). Categories evolved into themes for each data source as an "outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection" (Saldana, 2016, p. 15). I used *a priori* coding aligned to the

conceptual framework, then followed with open coding of all data collected, and finalized the coding process through axial coding. To assist with data analysis, I employed the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program, HyperRESEARCH, to assist in creating codes, disseminating data into categories, and storing data effectively and securely (Babbie, 2017). Initially, *a priori* coding was outlined to reflect the facets of transformational leadership behaviors. Open coding was implemented to allow for labeling of data collected as topics emerged. The study's research questions were the focus for axial coding. At that time, I was able to develop categories and themes to develop the research findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Information was organized in a table noting the frequency of like responses listed in descending order from most to least to assist in distinguishing among relevant information as data were summarized and interpreted (Saldana, 2016).

Discrepant cases. Discrepant cases were not uncommon in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Although the negative or discrepant information might have initially presented contradictory patterns or explanations, refinement of the analysis continued until the cases could be explained or reformulated (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The relevant information or code was useful in the development of themes and might have revised, broadened, and confirmed patterns themes from data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Upon further analysis, themes were layered from simple to complex, or interrelated through connections of sequence (Babbie, 2017).

Through the process of evaluating data, it was the intention that information collected answer the research questions guiding the study. The expected responses to the

research questions addressed how administrators' behaviors in the school district perceived themselves as leaders who influenced the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. The responses revealed perceived supports to administrators' transformational leadership behaviors. The results of the study would be presented to the local school district for consideration.

Trustworthiness

Quality in research is essential because knowledge is influenced by the outcomes (Burkholder et al., 2016). I paid close attention to ensure trustworthiness and dependability were monitored throughout the process (Burkholder et al., 2016). Alignment of the purpose, research question, and methodology in the research design project was critical to ensure a unified and cohesive research study could promote positive social change by adding to the existing body of knowledge in school leadership. Triangulation from the multiple data sources of interviews and personal reflections allowed for analysis and convergence of themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility was an essential component of the research design. Each participant reviewed his/her interview transcript to ensure accuracy of personal responses and viability in the setting through member checking (Saldana, 2016). By doing so, I structured "a study to seek and attend to complexity throughout a recursive research design process" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 188). Methods were aligned to the research questions, and evident patterns were expected to emerge from the analysis through the case study. Transferability would be achieved by providing a clear description of the context, allowing for transfer of the findings to similar contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability would be attained as

data were assessed using consistent methods through the research design (Babbie, 2017). The study was based on the perceptions of others; therefore, the use of validation strategies to obtain confirmability prevented my personal bias from overshadowing the outcomes of the research. A peer reviewer also was used through the data collection and analysis process to review transcripts, notes, and findings as an added measure to prevent personal bias (Burkholder et al., 2016). The individual fulfilled the minimum criteria of holding a doctorate degree, had experience in qualitative research methodology, and was knowledgeable of the most recent educational research.

Ethical Procedures

Every effort was made to protect the rights and well-being of all participants in the study. I sought permission to conduct the study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board. I followed procedures to ensure participants were protected and free from harm. To do so, the purpose of the study was balanced with the privacy of participants. Appropriate and proper ethical procedures were in place to ensure participants' rights were protected and no improprieties resulted.

Before the interview, I reviewed each participant's right of informed consent, what informed consent meant, why it was necessary, and his/her right to choose not to participate from that point further in the study. At the time of the interview, I conveyed to the participant who to contact if he/she had any questions. The digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed and saved as text files, and the recordings were then erased. The peer reviewer also signed a confidentiality agreement to protect the confidentiality of participants and sharing of data collected. For confidentiality purposes related to the

participants, I employed the use of pseudonyms and incorporated no other specific identifying information when sharing the case study findings. All collected data from interviews were transferred to a flash drive, stored in a locked file drawer at my home, and would remain for five years. Following the time retention of five years, the flash drive would be reformatted, erasing all contained data.

Summary

In the study, a qualitative methodology using the case study design explored how administrators of impoverished schools with successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. A case study approach was appropriate for the study as multiple data collection tools allowed for in-depth of analysis of the phenomenon of how leadership behaviors of school administrators linked to the successful academic achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds. The sample for the study consisted of 14 administrators from three public schools. Semistructured interviews and personal reflections were selected as sources for gathering data. During the face-to-face interviews, an interview guide served as a template to help me stay on track and be reminded of appropriate questions that were open-ended and not leading. By crafting questions that used specific language, the tool could help to ensure that I am asking questions that elicited more in-depth responses from the participant. Using the conventional interview approach of one-on-one interaction between participant and researcher, school administrators provided insight by sharing personal descriptions of leadership behaviors in public schools in which most students were from impoverished households, providing sufficient data to examine the problem. The interpretation of data

analyzed from interviews and personal reflections was synthesized to report findings and gain insight in the research questions from school administrators' descriptions as to how personal leadership behaviors influenced the academic outcomes of students from impoverished backgrounds. The study could be replicated and had potential to contribute to positive social change by soliciting a deeper understanding of effective leadership behaviors of administrators in high poverty schools and providing a benchmark for future studies exploring transformational leadership behaviors for successful school reform. Chapter 4 will present the results of data collected.

Chapter 4: Results

In Chapter 4, I will present the findings of the research study as determined through data collection. The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore how administrators of impoverished schools whose students demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. The methods were aligned to the research questions, and evident patterns emerged from analysis through the case study. The study examined explanations of how the phenomenon of interest, the leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to successful academic achievement of students from poverty. The research questions guiding the study included:

RQ1: How do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement describe personal transformational leadership behaviors?

RQ2: What do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement perceive as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors?

Semistructured interviews and personal reflections were selected as sources for gathering data.

Chapter 4 provides detailed data solicited and received using the research method. The following sections will be included: Setting, Data Collection, and Results. Trustworthiness will also be discussed regarding the implementation strategies of

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The chapter concludes with a summary of data answering the research questions.

Setting

The study took place in three schools in a district instructing students from impoverished areas in the southeastern United States showing advancement of student learning. The student populations of the three schools enrolled at least 60% low-income as discerned by the status of free or reduced meals at school. Qualification of free or reduced meals was determined through eligibility criteria which included: a family's annual income and number of family members by birth, marriage or adoption living in the household (Katz & Shah, 2017). According to a 2018 [REDACTED] Department of Education report, schools demonstrated academic gains in the area of English Language Arts on state-mandated assessments. The public-school district from which the three sample schools were selected had over 5,000 students enrolled in the 2017-2018 school year. The demographics of the school district included 60% minority and 40% Caucasian. Over 8% of students were English language learners and over 10% were students with disabilities. Each school campus had approximately 400 students in each grade level and included elementary, middle grades, and high school levels. All three schools selected within the study enrolled many students from low socioeconomic households and recently demonstrated advancement of student learning as determined by state-mandated assessments in the area of English Language Arts.

Leaders chosen for participation with the study had at least 3 years of experience in administration. Of the 14 administrators recruited, 10 agreed to participate in the study.

Five participants were female and five were male. Three administrators were African American, and seven were Caucasian. Of the 10 participants, four school leaders were employed in elementary grades, four at middle grades, and two at the high school level. No changes in personal or organizational conditions occurred during the time of the study, which may have affected interpretation of the study results.

Data Collection

Selection of appropriate instrumentation is an integral component when considering the purpose of the case study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In my study, semistructured interviews and personal reflection surveys were selected as sources for gathering data to thoroughly answer the research questions. All participants completed face-to-face interviews and personal reflection surveys. No variations or unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection from the plan presented in chapter three.

All interviews were conducted by me as the researcher. Each participant interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and occurred at the participant's workplace in a quiet area, free from interruption. An interview guide served as a template to guide and be reminded of appropriate questions that were open-ended and not leading. Participants took part in an interview comprised of 11 open-ended questions, developed using the four facets of transformational leadership behaviors which included idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (see Bass & Avolio, 1994, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Open-ended questions had been formatted to ascertain descriptions of administrators' personal transformational leadership behaviors and

supports to leadership behaviors. Interviews were recorded to remain attentive to participants. All data were captured for availability after the session was over and to ensure accuracy of data recall.

After each interview session, participants completed a printed survey to reflect on personal leadership behaviors. An adapted version of the MLQ survey was used for data collection (see Bass & Avolio, 2004). Administrators rated themselves ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 = not at all, 1 = once in a while, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, and 4 = frequently, if not always. Completed personal reflection surveys were collected from the participants. To end the scheduled appointment, I reiterated the purpose of the study and informal consent reasserted.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the digitally recorded contents. Transcriptions were emailed to participants for review, allowing for additions, deletions, and eventual approval. Participants were contacted a second time via email to review the topics that emerged from the interviews to check for accuracy of my interpretation of their data.

Data Analysis

For each tool, I used a specific data analysis strategy. Each recorded interview was transcribed into Microsoft Word files on my personal computer. I repeatedly read the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data collected. The transcriptions were then uploaded into the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program, HyperRESEARCH, to organize the data analysis process (see Babbie, 2017). Each interview was analyzed for accuracy in interpretation until common participant responses

were grouped together. Information was organized in a table noting the frequency of like responses listed in descending order from most to least to assist in distinguishing among relevant information as data were summarized and interpreted (see Table 3). The frequency of occurrence of codes was noted for consideration in the analysis process; however, more emphasis was placed on whether the code was applied across multiple participants' responses.

Table 3

Data Codes from Face-to-Face Interviews

Code Label	Frequency of Occurrence
Input from others	47
Team approach	45
Perspective	45
Communication	43
Lead by example	42
Individualized motivation	40
Expectations	40
Mutual respect	40
Idealized influence	36
Supports	35
Individualized consideration	34
Building relationships	33
Inspirational motivation	33
Coaching	32
Establish priorities	31
Build community	31
Gain insight	29
Professional learning community	29
Feedback	25
Recognizing the potential of others	25
Promote others	25
Give ownership to others	24
Supporting teachers	23
Identify needs	20
Classroom observations	18
Professional development	15
Open minded	14
Accountability	14
Cohesiveness	14
Intentionality	14
Listening	13
Shared decision making	12
Being visible	11
Data analysis	10
Take risks	10
Stay connected to teachers	10

Analysis of personal reflection surveys allowed me to gain an understanding of how school administrators viewed personal leadership behaviors relative to those of transformational leadership. Participants' responses for each of the descriptive statements were collectively analyzed to determine the degree to which they were used by school administrators. I entered each response into an Excel spreadsheet and calculated the average of ratings for each descriptive statement (see Table 4).

Table 4

Personal Reflection Survey Results

Survey Questions	Percentages (%)				
	Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, if not always
1. I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.	0	0	10	80	10
2. I talk about my most important values and beliefs.	0	0	10	30	60
3. I seek differing perspectives when solving problems.	0	0	0	50	50
4. I talk optimistically about the future.	0	0	0	20	80
5. I talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished.	0	0	0	10	90
6. I specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.	0	0	0	60	40
7. I spend time teaching and coaching.	0	0	10	40	50
8. I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group.	0	0	0	40	60
9. I treat others as individuals rather than just as a member of a group.	0	0	0	60	40
10. I consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.	0	0	0	0	100
11. I articulate a compelling vision of the future.	0	0	20	70	10
12. I consider an individual as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others.	0	0	0	40	60
13. I get others to look at problems from many different angles.	0	0	20	80	0
14. I help others to develop their strengths.	0	0	30	40	30
15. I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments.	0	0	10	50	40
16. I express confidence that goals will be achieved.	0	0	0	30	70

Also, the descriptive statements from the personal reflection surveys were aligned to the applicable transformational leadership behavior to assess the extent of being employed (see Table 5).

Table 5

Personal Reflection Survey Results Aligned to Transformational Leadership Behaviors

Transformational Leadership Behaviors	Percentages (%)				
	Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, if not always
Idealized Influence	0	0	3	32	65
Inspirational Motivation	0	0	5	32	63
Intellectual Stimulation	0	0	10	65	25
Individualized Consideration	0	0	10	45	45

Themes

During the analysis of data collected from interviews and personal reflection surveys, three strong themes emerged throughout the study. Each aspect of the research supported the necessity of administrators intentionally building relationships among the school community. The next theme presented in data collection expressed the importance of administrators and teachers committing to collective efficacy. Lastly, data revealed that a culture of coaching was prevalent in each of the impoverished schools with successful academic achievement outcomes. Understanding the importance of themes addressed how administrators' leadership behaviors in the school district perceived themselves as leaders who influenced the academic achievement of economically

disadvantaged students. Also, school leaders' responses revealed perceived supports to transformational leadership behaviors.

Building relationships. The establishment of trusting relationships based on mutual respect among school leaders and school communities was vital. The administrators strived for teachers and students to reach personal highest potential. With the understanding for full potential to occur, school leadership had to know individuals by building genuine relationships based on compassion, empathy, respect, and communication. One administrator said,

> For me, that means being a good listener, listening to the needs of the people that I interact with, and trying to make sure that I see the trust heart of the folks that I'm serving alongside or serving; so that I can make sure that my responses are not self-serving, but rather, for the good of the group.

To develop connections, relationships should be part of the school culture. A school leader shared "a culture of relationship building trumps strategy because it's incredibly difficult to support those you do not know in which meaningful relevance cannot take place." According to Louis (2015), school leaders leveraged relationships to foster stronger classroom practice and created supportive learning environments for both teachers and students.

Collective efficacy. The second theme evident throughout data was the need for a cohesive team led by the administrator with a clear sense of purpose through collective efficacy. School leaders perceived themselves to be individuals articulating vision, exhibiting high expectations, and holding followers accountable to fulfilling respective

roles in supporting the needs of one another and students. One administrator stated, "Vision starts with clarity. I have to make sure that I myself understand the vision for our school, meaning that I have to know what our ultimate destination is." The sense of purpose was communicated and kept at the forefront of everything that took place in the school. Another administrator shared, "You have to make sure that we're all on the same page from beginning which goes back to making sure that I establish an atmosphere of teamwork." School leaders consistently noted the importance of keeping the school community focused and not allowing factors outside of their control deter commitment to the vision. One school leader said:

> We're going to verbalize what our expectations are, what our standards are, what our goals are, and then we're going to walk them out. We aren't just saying this to have something to do, we are all invested in it, and we won't lose focus of that.

Administrators and teachers held one another accountable by modeling expectations, reviewing goals within the context of data, posing questions, and planning collaboratively. An individual stated, "As an administrative team, we try to be frank that we don't have all the answers, but we can collectively address issues by embracing the strengths of our colleagues and focusing on our purpose." Teachers engaged in a collaborative culture when they felt valued and respected through aspects of shared and supportive leadership behaviors (see Carpenter, 2015).

Culture of coaching. School leaders were also committed to creating a culture of coaching by embracing the task of aligning equitable and effective learning experiences

across the school environment with determination and focus, so that teachers and students both thrived. A school leader shared:

> It's about passing down whatever we can of our experience as educators. If we leave our teammates to learn exclusively from personal experiences, we're leaving students in a position where they might or might not get great instruction and support this year. Instead, we must insist that they will. Giving quality guidance to one another is critical to the development not only of the students but also of the teachers themselves.

Another administrator said, "Effective coaching makes us better at what we do. We have to practice the right things and acknowledge that our ways individually might not always be best." School leaders recognized the importance of supporting the professional growth of teachers and administrative teams by establishing environments in which people were willing to observe one another, give and receive feedback, and take risks. Vanblaere and Devos (2016) found professional growth related to transformational leadership should be centered around coaching and motivating teachers.

Discrepant cases. Discrepant cases are not uncommon in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One participant's interview responses concentrated primarily on student interactions when providing examples of leadership behaviors and seemed negative toward teachers, which was contrary to other individuals. The administrator indicated that "if we're solely focused on what we're supposed to do for kids and not acquiesce to others, we're going to achieve the vision". From other comments made by the participant during the interview, it was evident that consideration had been given to

supporting teacher needs by creating buy-in for various initiatives, using teacher leaders for professional development, and seeking feedback from the school community. Although the outlier information might have initially presented contradictory patterns or explanations, refinement of the analysis continued until data could be explained or reformulated (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Upon further analysis, data were interrelated through connections of relevancy (see Babbie, 2017).

Analysis of the data gathered perceptions of a specific group of public school administrators by investigating descriptions of personal transformational leadership behaviors and supports to leadership behaviors. Using the specific data tools of face-to-face interviews and personal reflections, research questions posed in the study could be thoroughly addressed.

Results

The research study was supported by the conceptual framework of transformational leadership style as defined by a set of behaviors articulated by Bass (1985). Transformational leadership behaviors included building trust, acting with integrity, encouraging others, encouraging innovative thinking, and coaching and developing people (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006), and descriptions of administrators' leadership behaviors aligned to the behaviors. Three themes strongly emerged through the collected data analysis: building relationships, collective efficacy, and a culture of coaching.

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked the following: How do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement describe personal transformational leadership behaviors? Each participant shared transformational leadership behaviors applied while leading on school campuses from the analysis of personal reflection surveys. Idealized influence behaviors were implemented 97% of the time often or frequently, inspirational motivation behaviors were implemented 95% of the time often or frequently, and intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration behaviors were reported as being used 90% of the time often or frequently. T responses provided supporting evidence of the consistent use of transformational leadership behaviors. Participants perceived themselves as expressing great confidence that the goals set forth would be achieved. Administrators reported speaking optimistically about the future and communicated enthusiastically about what needed to be accomplished. School leaders considered the moral and ethical consequences as high priorities when making decisions. Participants reported looking upon staff as individuals having different needs, abilities, and aspirations. Information shared in the face-to-face interviews was very similar in nature. Administrators valued the necessity of relationships with teachers, students, and community members to earn respect and trust. Participants took roles as leaders seriously by clearly and continually communicating the vision while helping followers understand the need for intentional commitment. School leaders challenged others collectively and individually to strive for greatness by promoting a culture of coaching.

Relationships. All participants articulated the importance of building relationships as a foundational component within the school community. School administrators took responsibility for building relationships among staff, students, and families. Participants did not allow positions of authority to define relationships but actively pursued earning respect and trust of others. One administrator said, “I want to be genuine, though, because I don't want it to come across as fake or me just trying to manipulate them into respecting me, I want to earn that.” Another administrator noted,

> I think that respect has to be mutual, and I start by modeling respect with students, their parents, and my teachers. And a lot of that, for me means being a good listener by listening to the needs of the people that I interact with, and trying to make sure that I see the true heart of the folks that I'm serving alongside or serving, so I can make sure that my responses are not self-serving, but rather for the good of the group.

Growing mutual respect through building relationships was articulated by all administrators, and one stated, “I think extending trust means you get to know them by giving them some autonomy and showing that I'm willing to walk alongside them; and if they make mistakes, I’ll be there for them.” A participant also said,

> I think if you were to show others respect, in most cases, it will be reciprocated. And I think in the cases where it's not, like a student discipline situation, or something like that, there's something else going on behind why the respect is not given. Either the relationship hasn't been established first or something else may be going on in the private life of the student or the teacher as to why that happens.

Another administrator stated, “I think you build that relationship by showing that you're with them, and it's not an us versus them, whether it be the teachers, the students, or whoever. You have to earn it; it’s not something that's given to you.” One school leader said, “One of the keys to building relationships is to show respect of others. I think if you are degrading or disrespectful to other people, then it's makes it more difficult for them to respect you. If you can show respect to other people, even when you disagree, it helps build a mutual respect between individuals.”

A school leader shared, “I'm not walking into any situation with any preconceived notions about someone based on where they come from, or where they live life. And doing more listening than talking.” Another participant emphasized, “So having a chance to listen to kids, teachers, community members, or whoever it is, and receiving and listening to what their realities are, gives me some insight to get to know people.” A school leader stated,

> I think that I can perceive others’ respect me, by the way they treat me when they're in front of me, but also the way they treat the things I asked them to do, the way they treat the information that I share with them, and then how they act about me when I'm not present.

All administrators noted the importance of building up others by intentionally incorporating others’ ideas and as one noted “. . . finding ways to do that on a regular basis, to empower them to be able to speak, to have a voice, and to protect that voice for them.” An administrator shared the importance of valuing the insight of others by “being able to go to them and ask them questions, ask them opinions about things that I'm

doing.” A school leader shared, “You have to make sure to be able to maintain that perspective, and you've got to constantly be communicating with those who are right there, trying to doing the work.” Another participant confirmed that in order to stay relevant as a leader, one must have been willing “to hear the voice of the people around [him/her] and to empower them to begin to speak out and talking about their conditions and what they're going through and what they see.”

Collective efficacy. Interviews and surveys indicated participating administrators developed vision for schools, starting with a clear understanding for themselves. One participant shared,

> I think that vision starts with clarity. I try to make sure that at first, I myself understand the vision for our school, as far as the social-emotional side of things as well as the academic piece. The vision means that I have to know what our ultimate destination is where we want to go.

School leaders helped others grasp the vision in a real and meaningful way. An administrator said, “I try not to be over complicated. I try to keep it simple and let the faculty know what our vision is for them and what our expectations are for them.” Another school leader shared, “The students should understand that the end goal is to walk across that stage at graduation. We want them to visualize the reality of what it will be like to get that diploma.” A participant stated, “Our faculty needs to realize where we're at, then what we want to be, and what it's going to take to get there. That’s my job to help them see that.” Another individual disclosed, “To cast a vision, we have to know where we're at currently and what we're trying to do. Without knowing where we are and

where to start, we don't really have a clear idea of how much we need to grow and what steps we need to take."

Administrators revealed communicating expectations associated with the vision should be clear and occur often until it becomes infused in the culture. A participant said the leader must "verbalize what our expectations are, what our standards are, what our goals are, and then we're going to walk them out." One administrator shared, "You can never say or speak of it too much. We revisit it in whole group meetings, in small group staff meetings, and one-on-one discussions. We try to keep the vision or the ultimate goal at the forefront of all the work we do." A participant noted, "We just don't talk about it all the time. I mean, I'm going to infuse it into what we do." Another added, "It's got to be something that we talk about every day, and we live it out. And I know it takes root when I hear my team members talking to other people about our vision and it's in their conversation."

All participants expressed the importance of allowing others the opportunity to actively participate in planning for improvement. A school leader stated, "I have to make sure that we're all on the same page from the beginning, and then it goes back to me making sure I establish an atmosphere of teamwork." A participant shared, "It's not ever going to be a thing where we're going to roll something out there, and then we're not going to invest in it either. We all have to be equally invested in the vision." One individual mentioned, "Let them go on that journey with you to find the best way to achieve the vision instead of just trying to figure it out along the way." Another participant said, "I think once you have shown others where you want to go, allow them

to be active participants and then more people are willing because they feel like they're part of something instead of you just telling them where they're going or what they should do." Also, administrators shared the importance of actively contributing to the school improvement process. One stated,

> As we walk through developing improvement plans, I want to make sure that I can put my hand on the back of these individuals and let them know that I'm there for them to help; wanting to make sure that my team knows that throughout this process, they can always find me accessible. I'm not just going to tell them something and then shut the door on them.

Culture of coaching. From data collected during interviews and personal reflection surveys, all participants believed school environments should promote an atmosphere of continuous learning for staff and that learning should extend beyond the individual. One administrator stated, "A crucial factor is re-delivering to colleagues and peers. We try to make sure that the knowledge that we're all gaining is shared, so that it's common knowledge and not isolated knowledge." Another participant mentioned,

> It's important at that moment to try and make sure that everybody understands, we're all on the same team. And we're here to learn and grow from each other. When the teachers are able to embrace the strengths of their colleagues and their own weaknesses, we found that the discussion is more beneficial for everybody involved.

All administrators reported a culture focused on coaching and not evaluation. A school leader expressed intentionality behind this effort by stating,

> We have to make time to talk to each other and get ideas from each other or other perspectives. I'm making sure that there's no judgment, or when mistakes are made, that we have time to reflect and to regroup and fix those mistakes, rather than a becoming a reprimand or some kind of punitive action.

Another individual said ". . . part of that is keeping a safe environment and making sure that they feel like they can take risks."

While professional learning opportunities aligned to the school's vision and improvement plan, school administrators also recognized the unique needs of individuals. A participant mentioned, "I think we have to identify which staff needs the support first. Because not all, professional learning is one size fits all." Another individual said the school leader should ". . . figure out which teachers need it first, and then tailor your professional learning to what they need." A school leader expressed the importance of relevancy,

> By setting up a professional growth mentality, we give our teachers professional learning, probably every week. We're touching base about something that revolves around what they're doing currently in the classroom. We're not just going in there and just giving them new tidbits of information, but it's applicable to the students they're serving and to the work they're doing. To help them with that, we constantly are monitoring our teachers in the classroom by finding their strengths and weaknesses and pouring into them beyond that.

Another administrator stated,

> We're always going to try to support [their professional growth], and we're going to say yes. But we're also going to help them identify areas of growth that we think that they need and suggest those types of things. In our professional learning communities, when we see something that is kind of pervasive across the staff, that's going to be a focus in our professional growth settings.

Data revealed school leaders continually supported teachers by providing quality feedback. A participant shared, “In order to support them, we have to be transparent with the weaknesses that we see that revolve around our kids and teachers. And then, we determine professional learning that would then support those weaknesses by building professional capacity.” Another school leader said, “We provide feedback that's appropriate for whatever their goals are, whatever their strengths and areas of growth. Then, they can see where I’m coming from and it’s not a reprimand.” An administrator noted,

> Then, they're more open to constructive criticism or feedback, and in turn, you can start finding the places where they can grow in their capacity, whether it be going into the context of shadowing with somebody in the building as an expert, or going to another school, or whatever the case may be, they're more receptive.

Conclusion. The first research question focused on how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. Each participant shared transformational leadership behaviors applied while leading school campuses. Behaviors focused on three themes –

relationships, collective efficacy, and a culture of coaching. Maintaining focus on themes enabled school administrators to interact with followers, share vision to support the success of students from impoverished backgrounds, collectively solve problems through critical thinking, and support the unique needs of individuals.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked the following: What do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement perceive as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors? All participants shared supports aligned to transformational leadership behaviors to promote organizational change as they interacted with followers. From the data collected, evidence showed administrators were committed to the success of both students and staff.

Relationships. Each administrator shared personal beliefs for the need to prioritize people over tasks. One individual said, “My role as the school leader is to be the biggest cheerleader of my staff.” Another participant noted the importance of “listening, lending a listening ear to our teachers, and providing them that support because culture is huge here. We really just want to make sure that we build teacher rapport among each other, build positive relationships—not only just with admin and teachers, but with colleagues and our families.” An administrator explained,

> We have set a culture of community within our building and a shared vision. So we do that by just keeping the main thing, the main thing. Kids are first in all of the decisions that we make. And we talk about that often. And we know that our students won't achieve without relationships. So, we set apart time to build those

> relationships, even just mere moments of time through greeting every child individually at the door every morning, conferring within a small group instruction, and getting to know individual kids. And then after that piece is a natural component that doesn't have to be thought about, then the academics layers in and we keep academics at the forefront.

A school leader explained that becomes a part of the school community when "teachers seem to have that sense of purpose. But they seem to because we're building relationships with kids and they see a need. And they're very driven and very motivated to want to help solve problem solve. And their input is encouraged."

School leaders reported establishing relationships with others through communication by soliciting a diverse range of perspectives. One participant shared,

> I'm not walking into any situation with any preconceived notions about someone based on where they come from or where they live life. And I have to do more listening than talking. I think a lot of times, we, not just as educators, but as people, sometimes think a certain way in where we have biases and things of that nature. So having a chance to listen to kids, teachers, community members, or whoever it is, and receiving and listening to what their realities are, gives me insight to get to know people.

An administrator said, "It's always very important to take everybody's perspective into account and have a working knowledge of that perspective. If you just sit back, point, and just tell them what to do, then at some point they will resent you." Each participant emphasized the necessity of getting feedback prior to decision-making and

being respectful of other viewpoints. A school leader shared, “I have to be fully aware of myself, who I'm talking to, and where are my conversations leading. If I talk to too many of the same folks, then I’m only getting one perspective. This will create a huge gap to exist.” Another individual stated, “Very rarely do I make a decision just solely by myself. I like to bounce things off of people. We discuss it, we talk about it and figure out what's best for our school and for our students and our teachers.” A school leader also said, “I have to keep a pulse on my school community. What are people's likes and dislikes? What do they like about the things that happen at school? What are they frustrated with? And we use that to help us make changes well and considering more than just my viewpoint.” An administrator stated,

> We're all different, kids are all different people, all different backgrounds. I think as a leader, it's more about everybody else and less myself. And that's one thing that I try to make sure that I’m thinking about every day. It's not about whatever I want, it's about what's best for our school community. And that's really the one thing that I try to keep in mind every day.

Collective efficacy. From data collected, participants emphasized the necessity of holding one another accountable, particularly through data analysis. An administrator noted, “With data, we do things like showing them current levels of performance, and the ultimate goal, and some benchmark numbers where we would be able to see incremental success along the path.” Each administrator shared how visual displays are used to track progress. One participant said the data room was “where we track student progress. And

that sounds really quantitative, and it is to a degree, but our purpose as an educator is largely to make sure our students are prepared." Another participant stated,

> Our data room allows us to track every individual student. And it's a visual that allows us to see which kids are moving and which kids are not. And seeing these children who have a variety of different backgrounds who come from diverse settings, progressing toward the ultimate goal of being literate students, helps remind us of our purpose as educators.

Another school leader said,

> The ownership or accountability for that progress rests on every teacher in this building. We have collaborative meetings where we review data. And in those meetings, each teacher is responsible for breaking down his or her data, looking at which kids have achieved at certain levels, and then moving those kids physically on the levels of progression or regression. And when the teachers do that, in the data room, they take a level of pride and a level of burden on their shoulders. And that sounds like a negative connotation. But truly, it's a privilege because they're able to see that the work they're pouring in is reflected in their students. And they own that data. And as a result, of course, I own those kids.

Administrators also established structures to promote shared decision making to expand ideas for the purpose of producing better outcomes in teaching and learning. Multiple participants revealed this happened "through collaborative planning and discussion" as they collectively "engaged in shared problem solving". Each school campus had a wide range of professional learning communities, including: school

leadership teams, grade level/department teams, operational teams, vertical teams, school governance teams, and parent volunteer organizations. An individual shared, “It's important to make sure that everybody understands, we're all on the same team and we're here to learn from each other. So, when the teachers are able to embrace the strengths of their colleagues and their own weaknesses, we found the discussion is more beneficial for everybody involved.” A participant shared, “We have to constantly be really looking for the different angles and not letting it just rest on the first thing said. I think allowing that wait time, digging further, playing some ‘what if’ scenarios, trying to play devil's advocate.” A participant stated,

> There’s power when they realize they're dealing with similar issues, but there is more than one way to solve through a process to work through a problem. Because a teacher may want to handle it one way and see another teacher has a different way. That doesn't mean one way is better than the other. It's just a different way. I think exposure to those things is important and being able to have conversations about what's going on the building without thinking that you're trying to say that this teacher’s doing better than you are.

School leaders provided other structures mitigating barriers to students learning and teachers’ instructional practices. Each participant mentioned the importance of meeting the needs of the “whole child”, whether that be academic, social/emotional, behavioral, or basic needs of the individual. School leaders worked with district leaders and community members to mobilize resources through the assistance of system-level structures and processes, enabling the schools to prioritize efforts. One individual stated,

"I think it's just the collaborative effort of everyone here. Our school community really pulls around to support our students." Administrators focused on protecting instructional time and ensuring teachers had needed resources. Multiple leaders said it was about "listening to teachers' needs" and then "connecting them to the resources". A participant shared the goal is "to create an environment where the teachers can do their jobs. It is really about making sure that they have everything they need to teach their class and then for the kids to get that teaching."

Culture of coaching. While administrators fostered the development of teachers, they actively sought opportunities to grow personal leadership competencies. Each mentioned regularly meeting with groups and colleagues to reflect upon leadership behaviors and learn from experiences to increase opportunities for success in the future. Participants paid careful attention to keep the things that worked and noted improvements for the future. An administrator also stated,

> One of the things that I feel like I have to do is I have to come to the table prepared, so prepping myself. It's one thing to stand in front of a group of individuals and just talk just because you might be a content expert. That's all well and good, but you've got to really be able to tell the story of what it is that you're looking at. I have to start with a great deal of time being given to studying what it is that I'm wanting to work on. When I come to the table, [teachers] see that there's a vested interest. It's not just another thing being given to them from the top down. I want teachers to feel passionate about their work in supporting our students.

Data revealed that administrators took time to model for and question followers to assist in reaching highest personal potential. By being actively engaged in professional learning with teachers, school leaders were able to articulate expectations in how to challenge the growth of the team and individuals. A participant said,

> We sit with our teachers, we hear a problem, and then we give them free time to talk it through. And if they aren't talking it through, then we act as that facilitator and guide them through questioning. We will ask questions that intentionally cause a discussion among teachers to talk about their own perspective, but to also intentionally listen to the perspective of other people.

Another administrator noted,

> We're not afraid to say as an administrative team, we missed the mark in this area. And here's what we're going to do to modify or change going forward. When teachers see us do that, they feel more comfortable doing it themselves. And then as a result, they also feel more comfortable letting their children take risks in the classroom. So I think it's about modeling that culture, asking questions, and being mindful of when teachers do approach us with questions that we are welcoming to that and we don't make them feel less than for being uncertain in some areas.

Administrators also did the same for students. A school leader stated,

> We're going to model what we're trying to get accomplished. If we're asking kids to be more successful in a certain area, then I have to set the example by taking care of the little things to make sure that we take care of the big things—our work ethic, how we treat people, and how we do things.

As evident in data collected, all school leaders clearly stated the importance of building the leadership capacity of others. A school leader said,

> A lot of times teachers will sit down and say, well, they're just not, or they can't, or list of a variety of reasons why factors outside of the school are causing that deficit [with our students]. But then, there are always a few outliers in the room, teachers, who are seeing success with a similar group. In that moment, it's important to make the person who is seeing a success, comfortable enough to share the practices and strategies they're using.

School administrators reported intentionally seeking out individuals who demonstrated effective leadership skills. Teacher leaders facilitated the various professional learning communities, and those individuals met frequently with administrators for coaching.

Conclusion. The second research question focused on what school administrators perceived as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors for the purpose of successful achievement outcomes of students from impoverished backgrounds. As referenced in data, each member of the school community took an active role in the team. The administrators of schools led the charge. Without the commitment of individuals attending to building positive relationships, pushing followers to stay focused on the vision collectively, and coaching one another to keep pushing forward, successful outcomes of students from low socio-economic households would likely have not occurred.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in the research results was essential because knowledge was influenced by the outcomes (Burkholder et al., 2016). Implementation of strategies related to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability outlined in Chapter 3 were executed as articulated and without adjustment. Data collection was aligned to the purpose, research questions, and conceptual framework of the research study.

Triangulation and member checking provided credibility in the research findings. Before each data collection period, I reviewed the research process by reviewing the codified procedures establishing my role as researcher. At the beginning of each interview session, I practiced transparency with participants to clearly outline an overview of my research, explain the instruments used for data collection, and provide an opportunity to address any questions. I also reflected upon the process immediately following each session. Triangulation from multiple data sources of interviews and personal reflections allowed for analysis and convergence of themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each participant reviewed his/her interview transcript to ensure accuracy of personal responses and viability in the setting through member checking (Saldana, 2016). By doing so, I structured "a study to seek and attend to complexity throughout a recursive research design process" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 188). The methods were aligned to the research questions, and evident patterns were expected to emerge from data analysis through the case study approach.

I demonstrated the likelihood of transferability by providing a clear description of the context, allowing for application of the findings to similar contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The prospective participants chosen for the study included only current administrators within the school district who demonstrated success in academic achievement of students from low-income households; therefore, homogeneous sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, was chosen based on school leaders being members in a group with similar characteristics (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Although transferable information from the study would be made available to other schools that served students from impoverished backgrounds, findings were not generalizable because the case study was not considered broad but narrow through a bounded system of interest (Yoon, 2016).

Using detailed methods and contextual information through the research design, dependability could be attained as the research process could be replicated and findings consistent (Babbie, 2017). To assist with data analysis, I employed a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program, organizing the analysis process and storing data effectively and securely for each interview transcript (Babbie, 2017). Initially, *a priori* coding was used to reflect facets of transformational leadership behaviors. Open coding was implemented to allow for labeling of data collected as additional topics emerged. The study's research questions were the focus for axial coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). At which time, I was able to develop themes to develop the research findings.

The study was based on the perceptions of others; therefore, use of validation strategies to obtain confirmability prevented my personal bias from overshadowing the outcomes of the research. A peer reviewer was used through data collection and analysis

process to review transcripts, notes, and findings as an added measure to prevent personal bias (Burkholder et al., 2016). The individual fulfilled the minimum criteria of holding a doctorate degree, had experience in qualitative research methodology, and was knowledgeable of the most recent educational research. Alignment of the purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, and methodology in the research design project was critical through data collection to ensure a unified and cohesive research study could promote positive social change by adding to the existing body of knowledge in school leadership. Triangulation from multiple data sources of interviews and personal reflections allowed for analysis and convergence of themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and served as an intentional goal of the study.

Summary

In the study, a qualitative methodology using case study design explored how administrators of impoverished schools with successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. The approach enabled in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of how leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to successful academic achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds. Analysis of data collected revealed three strong themes. Each aspect of the research supported the necessity of administrators intentionally building relationships among the school community. The next theme presented in data collection expressed the importance of administrators and teachers committing to collective efficacy. Lastly, data analysis revealed that cultures of coaching was prevalent in each of the impoverished schools with successful academic achievement outcomes.

Understanding the importance of themes addressed how administrators' behaviors in the school district perceived themselves as transformational leaders who influenced academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Relationships built on respect and trust with the school community was a foundational component articulated by all participants, while also valuing the insight of others. Administrators advanced collective efficacy by clearly defining the vision, communication expectations, and facilitating a team approach. A culture of coaching was instilled in the school community as individuals shared professional knowledge with others. Also, school leaders worked to balance understanding the unique needs of individuals through providing quality feedback.

Responses revealed perceived supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors associated from the three themes as well. Administrators shared beliefs for the need to prioritize people over tasks and established relationships with others through communication by soliciting a diverse range of perspectives. Data collected presented the necessity of holding one another accountable and providing structures to remove barriers for teaching and learning. While administrators fostered the development of teachers, they actively sought opportunities to grow personal leadership competencies. Data revealed that administrators took time to model for followers and pose questions to assist teachers in reaching personal highest potential, serving to build up the leadership capacity of others.

Chapter 5 will conclude the research study by offering an interpretation of findings related to the current literature supporting the conceptual framework of

transformational leadership behaviors within the context of the educational setting. Following, the limitations to trustworthiness that may have arose from completing the study, recommendations for further research, and the potential impact for positive social change will be presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore how administrators of impoverished schools whose students demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. The study was based on the conceptual framework of transformational leadership style as defined by a set of leadership behaviors (see Bass, 1985). A synthesis of research revealed of all school-influenced factors contributing to what and how students learn at school, leadership was second in strength only to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Radinger, 2014; Young et al., 2017). Research on administrators' perspectives of how leadership behaviors affected student performance was limited among students from impoverished backgrounds. The lack of research indicated a gap in knowledge of administrators' leadership behaviors related to the subgroup. I examined explanations of how the phenomenon of interest, the leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to successful academic achievement of students from poverty. The research questions guiding the study included:

RQ1: How do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement describe personal transformational leadership behaviors?

RQ2: What do administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement perceive as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors?

Key findings from the study aligned to the conceptual framework. Through data collection and analysis, three strong themes emerged throughout the study. Each aspect of research supported the necessity of administrators intentionally building relationships among the school community. The next theme presented in data collection expressed the importance of administrators and teachers committing to collective efficacy. Lastly, data revealed that cultures of coaching were prevalent in the impoverished schools with successful academic achievement outcomes. The themes addressed how administrators' behaviors in the school district perceived themselves as leaders influencing academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Responses revealed perceived supports to transformational leadership behaviors.

Interpretation of the Findings

Through the study, I sought to explain how the phenomenon of interest, the leadership behaviors of school administrators, was linked to successful academic achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds. In choosing the qualitative case study design for the study, I sought to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States with successful academic achievement described transformational leadership behaviors in addressing the phenomenon (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Woods & Martin, 2016; Zheng et al., 2017). An interpretation of research findings is presented below and then compared to the peer-reviewed literature from Chapter 2.

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students have demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. The conceptual framework for the study was based on transformational leadership as operationally defined by a set of leadership behaviors that fostered successful organizational change as leaders interacted with followers (see Bass, 1985). The behaviors exhibited by transformational leaders included idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Each participant shared transformational leadership behaviors applied on school campuses. School leaders strongly influenced the learning environment and that of the work of teachers and staff (see Baptiste, 2019; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Maintaining focus on transformational leadership behaviors enabled school administrators to interact with followers, share vision to support the success of students from impoverished backgrounds, collectively solve problems through critical thinking, and support the unique needs of individuals.

Relationships built on respect and trust with the school community was a foundational component articulated by all participants, while also valuing the insight of others. Damanik and Aldridge (2017) referenced the importance of professional interactions in building trust and engaging with staff members. Administrators placed a high priority on considering the moral and ethical consequences of decisions. A

transformational leader was respected and trusted by followers; and the leader was recognized with “exceptional abilities, endurance and determination” by those individuals (Stump et al., 2016, p. 83). Also, school leaders said a concerted effort was made to think beyond personal interests for the good of the group by listening to others. Transformational leadership involved behaviors in which administrators engaged and solicited team members to become actively involved in assessing the needs of the school culture for improvement through building a shared vision and mission (Damanik & Aldridge, 2017). Data confirmed the findings of the literature review.

Administrators advanced collective efficacy by clearly defining the vision, communication expectations, and facilitating a team approach. Mombourquette (2017) emphasized the necessity of administrators understanding the importance of identifying a shared vision, communicating vision, centering the efforts of the school community on achieving the vision, and celebrating successes. Participants spoke optimistically about the future and with confidence when giving the charge for what was needed. According to Makgato and Mudzanani (2019), school leaders lead teachers by inspiring toward a deeper sense of purpose while contributing to the transformation movement by working collectively to overcome challenges and achieve common goals. Successful distribution of leadership was likely to depend greatly on the collaborative nature among leaders, whereby characteristics of openness, mutual trust, and communication existed (Cansoy, 2019; Wang et al., 2016). Teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership are connected to participation through insightful dialogue and the existence of collective

responsibility (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). The research noted in the literature review and the study's results concurred.

Cultures of coaching were instilled in the school communities as individuals shared personal professional knowledge with others. School leaders worked to balance understanding the unique needs of individuals by providing quality feedback. Vanblaere and Devos (2016) found professional growth related to transformational leadership should be centered around coaching and motivating teachers, which could be a difficult challenge due to the interdependence of awareness, attitudes, and personal styles. Administrators understood the weaknesses of followers and worked to support followers' strengths. Transformational leaders stretched the mindset of followers by empowering to constantly question and assess the effectiveness of problem solving from a creative and thoughtful viewpoint (Stump et al., 2016). The research study supported information presented in the literature review.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused on what school administrators perceived as supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors for the purpose of successful achievement outcomes of students from impoverished backgrounds. As referenced in data, each member of the school community should take an active role in the team. Administrators of the schools led the charge. Without the commitment of individuals attending to building positive relationships, pushing followers to stay focused on the vision collectively, and coaching one another to keep pushing forward, successful

outcomes of students from low socioeconomic households would likely have not occurred.

Administrators shared personal beliefs for the need to prioritize people over tasks and build relationships with others through communication by soliciting a diverse range of perspectives. Administrators continually sought feedback from teachers, students, parents, and community members. School leaders leveraged relationships to foster stronger classroom practice and created supportive learning environments for both teachers and students (Louis, 2015). School administrators creating cultures of confidence and trust helped provoke teachers to strive for a greater concentration on effort and achievement and work better with one another in solving the challenges faced (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). School leaders propagated teacher empowerment by providing opportunities for shared decision making, improving the school climate, establishing positive communication mechanisms, and building relationships of trust (Balyer et al., 2017). The opportunities allowed for educators to work collaboratively by capitalizing upon the team's strengths, supporting disadvantaged students' academic success with intentionality, and nurturing a positive and meaningful climate resulting from strategic improvement goals (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). School administrators learned to balance the efforts of teachers, students, and community members, while working to strengthen the overall school environment (Xu et al., 2016). The study's data supported research from the literature review.

Data collected presented the necessity of holding one another accountable and providing structures to remove barriers of teaching and learning. Christiansen and Robey

(2015) posited the role of school leaders in setting the tone for the culture enabled schools to transform into an environment focused on teacher and student learning, teaching, and operational structures of support. Transformational leadership behaviors called for creating a culture focused on learning through routine communication of the mission, vision, values, and goals; approaching curriculum focused on student learning and quality instruction; empowering teachers to view themselves as leaders; providing teachers with needed information and staff development to make decisions that promote learning; and facilitating systems enabling collaborative work focused on teaching and learning (Woods & Martin, 2016). Administrators established structures to promote shared decision making to expand ideas for the purpose of producing better student achievement outcomes as noted in the literature.

Each participant provided examples of teacher led teams that assessed current practices, made recommendations, and improved initiatives based on data and feedback from others. Litz and Scott (2017) promoted creating a shared vision, improving effectiveness, establish high expectation, and building instructional capacity as necessary elements of strong leadership to achieve positive change. School leaders posited transformational leadership focused on results and underscored success. When led with a transformational style, teachers voluntarily followed administrators' direction by taking ownership of shared improvement goals and basing decisions on systematic data collection directly related to classroom instructional behaviors (Yoon, 2016). Transformational leadership was important within the structure of decision making as certain behaviors overlapped with factors that promote data, such as creating a shared

vision (Stump et al., 2016). The research study supported information articulated in the literature review.

While administrators fostered the development of teachers, they actively sought opportunities to grow personal leadership competencies. A school leadership effectiveness structure cannot be determined without first identifying what the administrator's role in the school is (Zheng et al., 2017). According to Ross and Cozzens (2016), administrators adjust leadership behaviors to support innovation, collaboration, diverse thinking, reflection, and professionalism to improve academic achievement. Transformational school leaders analyze both organizational strengths and weaknesses to better identify areas of needed improvement and proactively plan for essential changes (Yoon, 2016). The study's data supported research from the literature review.

Data from my study revealed administrators took time to model for followers and pose questions to assist followers in reaching fullest personal potential while serving to build up the leadership capacity of others. A transformational leader buffers teachers from external distractions by supporting collaboration of teachers and providing individualized support and consideration (Dutta & Sahney, 2016). Teachers engage in a collaborative culture when feeling valued and respected through aspects of shared and supportive leadership behaviors (Carpenter, 2015). According to Klar et al. (2016), aspects of the school structures that focus on a collective purpose and values, collaborative culture, and problem solving process, and continuous improvement promote distributed leadership and build leadership capacity for school reform. Administrators who demonstrated success were motivated to build capacity due to the needs of teachers

and students by pointing to four phases in the cultivation of leadership process: identification of potential leaders, creation of leadership opportunities, facilitation of a transition in roles, and continuous support (Klar et al., 2016). These points were confirmed through data analysis and literature review.

Limitations of the Study

Most of the limitations posed in Chapter 1 were sustained throughout the study as results could not be generalized due to the small sample size; however, schools with similar populations might find transferability through descriptive statistics. Researchers conducting case studies should be aware of any biases that may be prevalent to ensure sensitivity and integrity to not affect the outcome (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Biases could have occurred naturally because I was an employee of the school district participating in the study, but interview questions had been reviewed by another individual to ensure that those posed were open-ended and not leading to a desired outcome. To avoid any biases that might have influenced the results of the study, I focused on research questions and practiced firm adherence to data collection procedures. A small group of administrators participated in the study, so the lack of qualitative data from teachers presented a limitation in the findings. Initially, I was concerned that perceptions about leadership behaviors might not have been fully aligned to transformational leadership presented in the background literature which would have inhibited participants from expressing ideas in accordance with the conceptual framework; however, that was not the case based on data collected.

Recommendations

A synthesis of research revealed of all the school-influenced factors contributing to what and how students learn at school, leadership was second in strength only to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Radinger, 2014; Young et al., 2017). Research on administrators' perspectives of how leadership behaviors affected student performance was limited among students from impoverished backgrounds. According to Zheng et al. (2017), an administrator was responsible for establishing the priorities for teaching and learning in his/her school, and data did not serve as evidence that many school leaders determined effective leadership behaviors that mediated instruction for struggling, low-income students. The lack of research indicated a gap in knowledge of administrators' leadership behaviors related to the subgroup. The study was a logical step for inquiry based on data and the aforementioned literature. The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore how administrators of three impoverished schools in the southeastern United States whose students demonstrated successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. Participants of the study included only current administrators within the school district who demonstrated success in academic achievement of students from low-income households. Of the 10 participants, four school leaders were employed in elementary grades, four at middle grades, and two at the high school level.

Due to a small sample size from a specific location, a primary limitation of the study was the lack of generalizability of study results. Future researchers should consider reproducing the qualitative case study with school administrators in other areas who have

demonstrated success in academic achievement of students from low-income households to ascertain if the results can be replicated. The replication of findings from the research study may increase the generalizability of the study's outcomes.

Leithwood and Azah (2017) explored mission, visions, and goals; instructional systems; data usage; improvement processes; professional development; leadership development; and relationships among stakeholder groups; however, the study only concentrated on the perceptions of school leaders. A study soliciting feedback from teachers and parents about transformational leadership behaviors of administrators may lead to greater insights, yielding a complete view of impoverished schools in the southeastern United States with successful academic achievement.

Administrators who exercised effective leadership behaviors could recognize instructional strategies connecting teachers' classroom behaviors that determined students' strengths and weaknesses with individualized levels of needed support (Muthler, 2015). Whereas the research study was intended to yield informative explanations of how leadership behaviors of school administrators were linked to successful academic achievement of students from poverty, a new inquiry can be posed to determine if the same conceptual framework might be appropriate for other student groups. The potential research could offer study outcomes to support success of students with other learning needs.

Implications

In the study, findings have the potential to contribute in creating positive social change for school leaders who serve students from economically disadvantaged

households. After classroom instruction, school leaders were the second most influential school-related factor affecting student achievement as priorities focused on teaching and learning (Radinger, 2014; Young et al., 2017). The influence of school administrators on instruction and student learning "is layered, complex, and, most importantly, bounded" (Donaldson, 2013, p. 842). The study adds new knowledge to existing literature upon which future studies may build to extend school leadership and reform of systems and structures by acknowledging the relevancy of relationships, building collective efficacy, and establishing a culture of coaching.

By researching perspectives of administrators regarding personal leadership behaviors relating to successful student achievement outcomes, impactful social change can be offered to influence other school leaders' behaviors. Social change was a platform for scholarly research to expand insight for addressing the issues and challenges of today's society through evidence-based behaviors. The study identified areas in which school administrators can gain professional capacity, knowledge, and skills to more effectively use transformational leadership behaviors. Administrators valued the necessity of relationships with teachers, students, and school communities in working to earn respect and trust. Participants took the role of school leader seriously by clearly and continually communicating the vision, while helping individuals understand the need for intentional commitment. School leaders challenged others collectively and individually to strive for greatness by promoting a culture of coaching. Supporting learning through effective transformational leadership behaviors may also contribute to student achievement increases in schools of disadvantaged contexts.

As accountability measures become more prevalent, continuous school improvement efforts must be aligned to evidenced-based behaviors (Woods & Martin, 2016). Hagel (2014) supported the idea school administrators could positively affect student achievement, particularly in schools from disadvantaged areas, by being aware of personal leadership behaviors and putting those into action by focusing on improvement. School leaders' roles were to guide and support positive school change. School leaders built relationships with others through communication by soliciting a diverse range of perspectives. Participants emphasized the necessity of holding one another accountable, mainly through data analysis. Administrators also established structures to promote shared decision making to expand ideas, producing better outcomes in teaching and learning. While administrators fostered the development of teachers, they actively looked for opportunities to grow personal leadership competencies. Administrators took time to model for and question followers to assist followers in reaching highest personal potential. Outcomes of the study may also be used to inform school leadership programs and present considerations for school improvement.

Conclusion

Reform in the educational system compelled school leadership to think differently in response to the changing needs of students, growing professional capacity of teachers, and outcries from communities (Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Young et al., 2017). Effective transformational leadership behaviors shown through prior research to positively impact student achievement were not being consistently and pervasively implemented in public schools (Kellar & Slayton, 2016; Mombourquette, 2017; Stump et al., 2016). In the

study, a qualitative methodology using case study design explored how administrators of impoverished schools with successful academic achievement described personal transformational leadership behaviors. A case study approach was appropriate for the study as multiple data collection tools allowed for in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of how leadership behaviors of school administrators was linked to successful academic achievement of students from impoverished backgrounds. The inquiry was supported by the conceptual framework of transformational leadership style as defined by a set of behaviors articulated by Bass (1985). Transformational leadership behaviors included building trust, acting with integrity, encouraging others, encouraging innovative thinking, and coaching and developing people (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Data were collected from individual interviews and personal reflection surveys of administrators of public schools in which at least 50% of the student population was from low socioeconomic circumstances. Using the conventional interview approach of one-on-one interaction between participant and researcher, school administrators provided insight by sharing personal descriptions of transformational leadership behaviors in public schools in which most students were from impoverished households, providing sufficient data to examine the problem. The interpretation of data analyzed from the interviews and personal reflections were synthesized to report findings and garnered insight in the research questions.

Analysis of data collected revealed three strong themes throughout the study. Each aspect of research supported the necessity of administrators intentionally building relationships among the school community. The next theme presented in data collection

expressed the importance of administrators and teachers committing to collective efficacy. Lastly, participants' responses revealed that a culture of coaching was prevalent in each of the impoverished schools with successful academic achievement outcomes.

Themes addressed how administrators' behaviors in the school district perceived themselves as transformational leaders who influenced academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Relationships in the school community built on respect and trust were a foundational component articulated by all participants, while also valuing the insight of others. Administrators advanced collective efficacy by clearly defining the vision, communication expectations, and facilitating a team approach. A culture of coaching was instilled in the school community as individuals shared professional knowledge with others. Also, school leaders worked to balance understanding the unique needs of individuals through providing quality feedback.

Responses revealed perceived supports to personal transformational leadership behaviors associated from the three themes as well. Administrators shared beliefs for the need to prioritize people over tasks and built relationships with others through communication by soliciting a diverse range of perspectives. Data collected presented the necessity of holding one another accountable and providing structures to remove barriers for teaching and learning. While administrators fostered the development of teachers, they actively sought opportunities to grow personal leadership competencies. Data revealed that administrators took time to model for followers and posed questions to assist followers in reaching personal potential, serving to build up the leadership capacity of others.

The study can be replicated and contributes to positive social change by employing a deeper understanding of effective leadership behaviors of administrators in high poverty schools and providing a benchmark for future studies exploring transformational leadership behaviors for successful school reform.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Procedure:

A. I will explain my role as researcher.

B. I will provide an overview of my research, followed by asking if the participant has any questions.

C. I will explain the instruments that will be used for data collection, including the interview guide, personal reflection survey, and audio voice recording application.

D. I will review the consent form and obtain a signature.

E. I will conduct the interview.

F. I will ask the participant to complete the personal reflection survey.

G. I will reiterate the purpose of the study and ask if the participant has any other questions.

Interview Questions:

1. What are ways you build the respect of others?

2. How do you articulate vision and promote the achievement of goals?

3. What are ways you get teachers to look at problems from different angles?

4. How do you support the professional growth of your staff?

5. What supports are in place to build a sense of purpose in your school?

6. Please describe specific behaviors that help you create an atmosphere of academic focus within the school community.

7. What kinds of behaviors help you include different groups in decision-making?

8. What are ways you support others in developing their strengths?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your leadership behaviors?

10. How long have you been a school administrator?

11. Please share how often do you engage in professional development specific to your role as school leader.

Appendix B: Personal Reflection Survey

This personal reflection survey is to describe your leadership behaviors as you perceive them. Please use the rating scale to respond to each item. If an item is unrelated to your responsibilities as a leader, or if you are unsure, you may leave the response blank.

Sixteen descriptive statements are listed. Consider how frequently each statement corresponds to you as a school administrator.

Use the following rating scale:

Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, if not always
0	1	2	3	4

1. I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.	0	1	2	3	4
2. I talk about my most important values and beliefs.	0	1	2	3	4
3. I seek differing perspectives when solving problems.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I talk optimistically about the future.	0	1	2	3	4
5. I talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished.	0	1	2	3	4
6. I specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.	0	1	2	3	4
7. I spend time teaching and coaching.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group.	0	1	2	3	4
9. I treat others as individuals rather than just as a member of a group.	0	1	2	3	4
10. I consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I articulate a compelling vision of the future.	0	1	2	3	4
12. I consider an individual as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others.	0	1	2	3	4
13. I get others to look at problems from many different angles.	0	1	2	3	4
14. I help others to develop their strengths.	0	1	2	3	4
15. I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments.	0	1	2	3	4
16. I express confidence that goals will be achieved.	0	1	2	3	4

This personal reflection survey was developed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass and Avolio (2004).